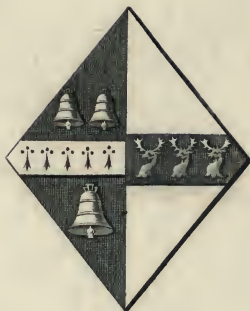




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*Elizabeth Bell.*

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**LECTURES**  
**ON**  
**RHETORIC**  
**AND**  
**BELLES LETTRES,**  
**IN THREE VOLUMES.**

By HUGH BLAIR, D. D. AND F. R. S. EDIN.  
ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND PROFESSOR OF  
RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY  
OF EDINBURGH.

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**A New Edition.**

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**VOLUME FIRST.**

**LONDON:**

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM ALLASON, NO. 31, NEW BOND STREET,  
AND J. MAYNARD, PANTON STREET, HAYMARKET.

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**1818.**



## PREFACE.

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**T**HE following LECTURES were read in the University of Edinburgh for twenty-four years. The publication of them at present, was not altogether a matter of choice. Imperfect copies of them in manuscript, from notes taken by students who heard them read, were first privately handed about ; and afterwards frequently exposed to public sale. When the author saw them circulate so currently, as even to be quoted in print \*, and found himself often threatened with surreptitious publications of them, he judged it to be high time that they should proceed from his own hand, rather than come into public view under some very defective and erroneous form.

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\* Biographia Britannica. Article ADDISON.

They were originally designed for the initiation of youth into the study of Belles Lettres, and of composition. With the same intention they are now published; and, therefore, the form of Lectures, in which they were at first composed, is still retained. The author gives them to the world, neither as a work wholly original, nor as a compilation from the writings of others. On every subject contained in them, he has thought for himself. He consulted his own ideas and reflections: and a great part of what will be found in these Lectures is entirely his own. At the same time, he availed himself of the ideas and reflections of others, as far as he thought them proper to be adopted. To proceed in this manner was his duty as a public professor. It was incumbent on him, to convey to his pupils all the knowledge that could improve them; to deliver not merely what was new, but what might be useful, from whatever quarter it came. He hopes, that to such as are studying to cultivate their taste, to form their style, or to prepare themselves for public speaking or composition, his Lectures will afford a

more comprehensive view of what relates to these subjects, than, as far as he knows, is to be received from any one book in our language.

In order to render his work of greater service, he has generally referred to the books which he consulted, as far as he remembers them; that the readers might be directed to any farther illustration which they afford. But, as such a length of time has elapsed since the first composition of his Lectures, he may, perhaps, have adopted the sentiments of some author into whose writings he had then looked, without now remembering whence he derived them.

In the opinions which he has delivered concerning such a variety of authors, and of literary matters, as come under his consideration, he cannot expect that all his readers will concur with him. The subjects are of such a nature, as allow room for much diversity of taste and sentiment: and the author will respectfully submit to the judgment of the public.

Retaining the simplicity of the Lecturing style, as best fitted for conveying instruction, he has aimed, in his language, at no more than perspicuity. If, after the liberties which it was necessary for him to take, in criticising the style of the most eminent writers in our language, his own style shall be thought open to reprehension, all that he can say is, that his book will add one to the many proofs already afforded to the world, of its being much easier to give instruction, than to set example.



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THE  
LIFE

OF

DR HUGH BLAIR.

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**D**R HUGH BLAIR was born in Edinburgh on the 7th of April 1718. He was descended from the ancient and respectable family of Blair, in Ayrshire. His great-grandfather, Mr Robert Blair, minister of St Andrews, and chaplain to Charles I. was distinguished by his firm attachment to the cause of freedom, and his zealous support of the Presbyterian form of church government, in the time of the civil wars. The talents of this worthy man seem to have descended as an inheritance to his posterity. Of the two sons who survived him, David, the eldest, was one of the Ministers of the Old Church in Edinburgh, and father of Mr Robert Blair, minister of Athelstaneford, the celebrated author of the poem, entitled "The GRAVE," and grandfather of Lord President Blair, distinguished by his masculine eloquence, profound knowledge of law, and hereditary love of literature. From his youngest son Hugh, sprung Mr John Blair, who was a respectable merchant, and one of the Magistrates of Edin-

burgh. He married Martha Ogston; and the first child of this marriage was the excellent person who is the subject of this narrative.

In consequence of some misfortunes in trade, his father retired from mercantile business, and obtained an office in the Excise; yet his fortune was not so much impaired as to prevent him from giving his Son a liberal education.

From his earliest youth his views were turned towards the clerical profession, and his education received a suitable direction. After going through the usual grammatical course at the High School, he entered the Humanity class, in the University of Edinburgh, in October 1730, and spent eleven years in that celebrated seminary in the study of literature, philosophy, and divinity. In all the classes he was distinguished among his companions, both for diligence and proficiency; but in the Logic class he attained particular distinction, by an Essay *On the Beautiful*; which had the good fortune to attract the notice of Professor Stevenson, and was appointed to be read publicly at the end of the session, with the most flattering marks of the Professor's approbation. This mark of distinction made a deep impression on his mind, and determined the bent of his genius towards polite literature.

At this time, he formed a plan of study which contributed much to the accuracy and extent of his knowledge. It consisted in making abstracts of the most important works which he read, and in digesting them according to the train of his own thoughts. History, in particular, he resolved to study in this manner, and constructed a very comprehensive scheme of chronological tables for receiving into its proper place every important fact that should occur. This scheme has been given to the world in a more extensive and correct form by his learned friend Dr John Blair, Prebendary of Westminster, in his "Chronology and History of the World."

In 1739, he took the degree of Master of Arts; and on that occasion, printed and defended a thesis, *De fundamentis et obligatione Legis Naturæ*, which exhibits an outline of the moral principles by which the world was afterwards to profit in his *Sermons*.

At this period he was engaged as a tutor in the family of Lord Lovat, and spent one summer in the north country, attending his Lordship's eldest son, afterwards General Fraser. When his pupil was appointed to the command of the 71st Regiment, he testified his respect for his old tutor, by making him chaplain to one of its battalions.

On the completion of his academical course, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, on the 21st of October 1741. His first appearances in the pulpit fully justified the expectations of his friends, and, in a few months, the fame of his eloquence procured for him a presentation to the church of Colessie, in Fife-shire, where he was ordained minister on the 23d September 1742.

He was not permitted to remain long in the obscurity of a country parish. In consequence of a vacancy in the second charge of the Canongate of Edinburgh, which was to be supplied by popular election, his friends were enabled to recal him to a station more suited to his talents. Though Mr Robert Walker, a popular and eloquent preacher, was his competitor, he obtained a majority of votes, and was admitted on the 14th of July 1743. In this station he continued eleven years, assiduously devoted to the attainment of professional excellence, and the regular discharge of his parochial duties.

In 1748, he married his cousin, Catharine Bannatyne, daughter of the Rev. James Bannatyne, one of the ministers of Edinburgh; a woman distinguished for the strength of her understanding, and the prudence of her conduct. In consequence of a call from the Town Council of Edin-

burgh, he was translated from the Canongate to Lady Yester's church, in the city, on the 11th of October 1754; and from thence to the first charge in the High Church, on the 15th of June 1758, the most respectable clerical situation in the kingdom. The uniform prudence, ability, and success, which, for a period of more than fifty years, accompanied all his ministerial labours in that conspicuous and difficult charge, sufficiently evince the wisdom of their choice. His discourses from the pulpit were composed with uncommon care, and attracted universal admiration.

In June 1757, the University of St Andrew's shewed its discernment, by conferring on him the degree of Doctor in Divinity; an academical honour which at that time was very rare in Scotland.

His fame as a preacher was by this time established, but no production of his pen had yet been given to the world; except two *Sermons*, preached on particular occasions, some translations, in verse, of passages of Scripture for the Psalmody of the church, and the article on Dr Hutcheson's "System of Moral Philosophy," in the "Edinburgh Review;" a periodical Work begun in 1755. Of this paper two numbers only appeared, in which his learned friends Dr Adam Smith, Dr Robertson, and Mr Wedderburn, afterwards Earl of Roslin, had a principal share.

At an early period of his life, while he, and his cousin Mr George Bannatyne, were students in Divinity, they wrote a poem entitled *The Resurrection*, copies of which were handed about in manuscript. No one appearing to claim the performance, an edition of it was published in 1749, in folio, to which the name William Douglas, M. D. was appended as the author.

Besides the compositions above mentioned, he was supposed to have repelled an attack on his friend Lord Kames, by Mr George Anderson, in his "Analysis of the Essays on Morality," &c. in a pamphlet, entitled, *Observations on*

*the Analysis*, &c. 8vo. 1755, and was believed likewise to have lent his aid in a formal reply made by Lord Kames himself, under the title of *Observations against the Essays on Morality and Natural Religion, examined*, 8vo. 1756\*.

Having now found sufficient leisure, from the laborious duties of his profession, to turn his attention to general literature, he began seriously to think on a plan for teaching to others that art which had contributed so much to the establishment of his own fame. Encouraged by the success of his predecessors, Dr Smith, and Dr Watson, and the advice of his friend Lord Kames, he prepared, with this view, a course of Lectures on Composition, and having obtained the approbation of the University, he began to read them in the College on the 11th of December 1759. To this undertaking he brought all the qualifications requisite for executing it well; and along with them a weight of reputation which could not fail to give effect to the lessons he should teach. Accordingly, his first course of Lectures was well attended, and received with great applause.

In August 1760, the Town Council of Edinburgh instituted a Rhetorical class in the University, under his direction, as an addition to the system of academical education. And, in April 1762, on a representation to his Majesty, setting forth the advantages of the institution, as a branch of academical education, the King, "in consideration of "his approved qualifications," erected and endowed his establishment in the University, by appointing him the first Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, with a salary of £70.

In 1760, he was made the instrument of introducing into the world, "Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse language," 12mo. to which he prefixed a

\* Lord Woodhouselee's Life of Lord Kames, Vol. I. p. 142.



*Preface.* These “Fragments” were communicated by Mr Macpherson, and followed, in the same year, by “Fingal” and “Temora,” published by him as translations of complete and regular epic poems, the production of Ossian, a Highland bard, of remote antiquity. Being himself persuaded of their being completely genuine, he published, in 1762, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, &c. 4to. in proof of their antiquity, and illustrative of their beauties, which spread the reputation of its author throughout Europe. Of those who attended to the subject, a greater number were disposed to agree with him as to the beauty of the Poems, than as to their authenticity. At the head of this set of critics was Dr Johnson, who in his “Journey to the Western Islands,” strenuously maintained their being altogether a forgery. Mr Macpherson, the pretended translator, carefully reserved his latent claims to the rank and merit of an original poet, and did not conceal from those with whom he was particularly intimate, that the poems were entirely his own composition\*.

In 1773, it fell to his share to form the first uniform edition of the *Works of the British Poets*, which appeared in these kingdoms, printed at Edinburgh, in 42 vols. 12mo. for Messrs Creech and Balfour. The elegance of this edition is no compensation for its incompleteness; the contracted list of authors, marked out by the editor, including none of those who have been denominated our older classics, except Milton and Cowley. His industry and taste were also exercised, about this time, in superintending an edition of the *Works of Shakespeare*, printed at Edinburgh, by Martin and Wotherspoon, in 10 vols. 12mo.

Though his productions for the pulpit had long furnished instruction and delight to his own congregation, yet it was not till the year 1777 that he gave to the world the

\* Anderson's Life of Johnson, 3d edit. p. 342.

first volume of his *Sermons*, which was printed at London in 8vo. for Messrs Strahan and Cadell, London, and had a very extensive sale.

It is remarkable, that when he transmitted his manuscript to Mr Strahan, the printer, after keeping it by him for some time, he wrote a letter to him, declining the publication. Having, however, sent one of the sermons to Dr Johnson, for the sake of his opinion, he received from him, after the unfavourable letter was dispatched, the following note :-

“ I have read over Dr Blair’s first sermon with more than approbation ; to say it is good, is to say too little. It is excellently written, both as to doctrine and language \*.”

Soon after, Mr Strahan had a conversation with Dr Johnson concerning the publication, and very candidly wrote again to Dr Blair, enclosing Dr Johnson’s note, and agreeing to purchase the volume for one hundred pounds.

This volume of discourses was followed, at different intervals, by three other volumes, each succeeding volume increasing the sale of the former volumes. One hundred pounds were given for the *first* volume, which, in consequence of the extensive sale, the proprietors doubled. They gave him £300 for the *second*, and £600 for each of the *third* and *fourth* volumes.

These discourses experienced a success unparalleled in the annals of pulpit eloquence. They circulated rapidly and widely wherever the English tongue extends, were soon translated into almost all the languages of Europe, and were judged worthy of a public reward by his Majesty, who, in the year 1780, was graciously pleased to grant the author a pension of £200, which continued till his death. It is said, that they were read to the Royal family by the Earl of Mansfield, and that her Majesty honoured them

\* Boswell’s Life of Johnson, Vol. III. p. 100.

with her approbation, and took an active part in procuring him this proof of the Royal favour.

Hitherto, the writers of sermons, among the Scottish preachers, had produced no models of a refined and polished eloquence. Their discourses abounded in cold divisions, metaphysical discussion, or loose and incoherent declamation. Among his contemporaries, some preachers had distinguished themselves by the good sense, sound reasoning, and manly simplicity of their pulpit compositions. "But the polish of Dr Blair, which gave elegance to sentiments not too profound for common comprehension, nor too obvious to be uninteresting, was wanting to render this species of composition popular, and generally pleasing. By employing the utmost exertions of a vigorous mind, and of patient study, to select the best ideas, and to prune off every superfluous thought, by taking pains to embellish them by all the beauties of language and elegant expression, and by repeatedly examining, with the severity of an enlightened critic, every sentence, and erasing every harsh and uncouth phrase, he has produced the most elegant models of pulpit composition that have yet appeared in these kingdoms \*."

In the enjoyment of the praise of polished eloquence, there are other men who participate with Dr Blair; but in the application of talents and of learning, to render mankind wiser or better, there are few literary characters who can claim an equal share; and, though the highest praise is due to his compositions for the pulpit, considered as the productions of genius and of taste, yet, when they are regarded in this more important light, they entitle him to that still more honourable fame, which is the portion of the wise and good alone, and before which all literary splendour disappears.

\* Anderson's Life of Logan; Works of the British Poets, Vol. XI. p. 1032.



After reading his course of Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University above twenty years, he retired from the discharge of his academical duties in 1783. His academical prelections constitute an era in the history of the progress of taste and elegance in Scotland. His classical taste, his aversion from refinement and scepticism, his good intentions, his respect for received opinions, his industry, and his experience in the art of teaching, enabled him to present to young men, aiming at literary composition, a most judicious, elegant, and comprehensive system of rules for forming their style, and cultivating their taste.

The same year, he published his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, in 2 vols. 4to. which brought him a considerable accession of emolument and fame. They have been frequently reprinted in 3 vols. 8vo. and deservedly occupy a place in our schools and Universities, as an excellent elementary treatise on the studies of composition and eloquence. They contain an accurate analysis of the principles of literary composition, in all the various species of writing; a happy illustration of those principles by the most beautiful and apposite examples, drawn from the best authors, both ancient and modern, and an admirable digest of the rules of elocution, as applicable to the oratory of the pulpit, the bar, and the popular assembly. They do not aim at a work purely original; for this would have been to circumscribe their utility; neither in point of style are they polished with the same degree of care as his *Sermons*: yet, so useful is the object of these *Lectures*, so comprehensive their plan, and such the excellence of the matter they contain, that, if not the most splendid, they will perhaps prove the most durable monument of his reputation.

From this period his talents were consecrated solely to the instruction of his congregation, and the private and

unseen labours of his office ; preparing for the world the blessings of elegant instruction, and tendering to the mourner the lessons of divine consolation. From that part of his professional duty, which regarded the government of the church, he was prevented, by his timidity and diffidence in his abilities, from taking any active part ; but he was steadily attached to the cause of moderation, and his opinion was eagerly courted by Dr Robertson, Dr Drysdale, Dr Hill, Dr Finlayson, and others, who managed ecclesiastical business. The outline of the pastoral admonition, which the General Assembly, in 1799, addressed to the people under their charge, proceeded from his pen.

In the course of his life he had frequently visited London, and had been introduced to the acquaintance of Dr Johnson, Dr Percy, afterwards Bishop of Dromore, and other distinguished literary characters in England. On the recommendation of Dr Percy, the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland committed to him the care of their second son, Lord Algernon Percy, afterwards Earl of Beverley, when he prosecuted his studies at the University of Edinburgh. Among his countrymen, Lord Kames, David Hume, Dr Smith, Dr Robertson, Dr Fergusson, Mr John Home, and Dr Carlyle, were the persons with whom he lived in habits of intimacy, and with whom, during the greater part of his life, he maintained social intercourse.

Upon the death of Dr Robertson, Principal of the University of Edinburgh, in the year 1793, the unanimous voice of the country acknowledged his claim to be appointed the successor of that illustrious man. When the Magistrates and Council of Edinburgh gave the appointment to another, it is certain that he felt the oversight as injurious to his pretensions. Flattered with the respect of the world, and unaccustomed to disappointments during a long life, that had been devoted to literary pursuits, he could

ill brook any neglect when that life was drawing to a close.

In the year 1795, he suffered a heavy domestic calamity by the death of Mrs Blair, who had shared, with the tenderest affection, in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happiness and comfort. By her he had a son, who died in infancy, and a daughter, of a most amiable disposition, and elegant accomplishments, who died at the age of twenty.

For some years he had felt himself unequal to the fatigue of instructing his congregation from the pulpit, yet he continued to the end of his life in the active and cheerful discharge of all his other official duties. At the solicitation of his friends, he preached the annual Sermon for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of Scotland in 1797, which produced a liberal collection, and closed the labours of the pulpit.

Though his bodily constitution was not robust, yet he enjoyed a general state of good health, and, through habitual cheerfulness, temperance, and ease, survived the usual term of human life. During the summer before his death, he was employed in preparing the last volume of his *Sermons* for the press, and evinced his usual vigour of understanding, and capacity of exertion. A few days before he died he had no complaint; but on the 24th of December 1800, he felt a pain in his bowels, which was not then suspected to proceed from an inguinal hernia, which he considered as trifling. On the afternoon of the 26th, the pain increased, and the symptoms became violent, and alarming. In consequence of an incarceration of the hernia, it produced a complete stoppage in the bowels, and an inflammation commenced, which it was impossible to resist. Retaining to the last moment the full possession of his mental faculties, he expired on the morning of the 27th,

with the composure and hope of a Christian pastor, in the 83d year of his age, and the 59th of his ministry.

He bequeathed his house in Argyle Square, which had been his residence above thirty years, and his personal property, which was considerable, to his relation, Mr Richard Bannatyne, merchant in Edinburgh, with an explicit injunction, suggested by an excusable solicitude for his reputation, that all his manuscript sermons and letters should be destroyed.

The *Sermons* which he had transcribed, and, in many parts, re-composed for the press, after he had completed his eighty-second year, were delivered to the publishers about six weeks before his death, and printed in 1801, with a short account of his Life, written by his friend and colleague, Dr Finlayson; who himself now needs a similar memorial of his talents and virtues. He had himself paid a similar tribute to the memory of his colleague Mr Robert Walker, by prefixing a candid and affectionate *Preface* to the last volume of his *Sermons*. A more ample and elaborate account of his Life and writings, drawn up at his request, by Dr John Hill, Professor of Humanity in the University of Edinburgh, was printed in 1807, when the writer himself was beyond the reach of praise or censure.

The name of Dr Blair needs no panegyric. His literary honours are a trophy which he has erected for himself, and which time will not destroy. Posterity will justly regard him as a benefactor of the human race, and as no ordinary instrument, in the hand of God, for refining the taste, improving the morality, and promoting the religion of the Christian world.

## LECTURE I.

### INTRODUCTION.

ONE of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind, is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, reason would be a solitary, and, in some measure, an unavailing principle. Speech is the great instrument by which man becomes beneficial to man: and it is to the intercourse and transmission of thought, by means of speech, that we are chiefly indebted for the improvement of thought itself. Small are the advances which a single unassisted individual can make towards perfecting any of his powers. What we call human reason, is not the effort or ability of one, so much as it is the result of the reason of many, arising from lights mutually communicated, in consequence of discourse and writing.

It is obvious, then, that writing and discourse are objects entitled to the highest attention. Whe-



ther the influence of the speaker, or the entertainment of the hearer, be consulted ; whether utility or pleasure be the principal aim in view, we are prompted, by the strongest motives, to study how we may communicate our thoughts to one another with most advantage. Accordingly, we find, that in almost every nation, as soon as language had extended itself beyond that scanty communication which was requisite for the supply of men's necessities, the improvement of discourse began to attract regard. In the language even of rude, uncultivated tribes, we can trace some attention to the grace and force of those expressions which they used, when they sought to persuade or to affect. They were early sensible of a beauty in discourse, and endeavoured to give it certain decorations, which experience had taught them it was capable of receiving, long before the study of those decorations was formed into a regular art.

But, among nations in a civilized state, no art has been cultivated with more care, than that of language, style, and composition. The attention paid to it may, indeed, be assumed as one mark of the progress of society towards its most improved period. For, according as society improves and flourishes, men acquire more influence over one another by means of reasoning and discourse ; and in proportion as that influence is felt to enlarge, it must follow, as a natural consequence, that they will bestow more care upon the methods of ex-

pressing their conceptions with propriety and eloquence. Hence we find, that in all the polished nations of Europe, this study has been treated as highly important, and has possessed a considerable place in every plan of liberal education.

Indeed, when the arts of speech and writing are mentioned, I am sensible that prejudices against them are apt to rise in the minds of many. A sort of art is immediately thought of, that is ostentatious and deceitful; the minute and trifling study of words alone; the pomp of expression; the studied fallacies of rhetoric; ornament substituted in the room of use. We need not wonder, that, under such imputations, all study of discourse, as an art, should have suffered in the opinion of men of understanding; and I am far from denying, that rhetoric and criticism have sometimes been so managed as to tend to the corruption, rather than to the improvement, of good taste and true eloquence. But sure it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art, as to any other that is cultivated among men. If the following Lectures have any merit, it will consist in an endeavour to substitute the application of these principles in the place of artificial and scholastic rhetoric; in an endeavour to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show, to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition, and simplicity an essential to all true ornament.

When entering on the subject, I may be allowed, on this occasion, to suggest a few thoughts concerning the importance and advantages of such studies, and the rank they are entitled to possess in academical education\*. I am under no temptation, for this purpose of extolling their importance at the expence of any other department of science. On the contrary, the study of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres supposes and requires a proper acquaintance with the rest of the liberal arts. It embraces them all within its circle, and recommends them to the highest regard. The first care of all such as wish either to write with reputation, or to speak in public so as to command attention, must be, to extend their knowledge; to lay in a rich store of ideas relating to those subjects of which the occasions of life may call them to discourse or to write. Hence, among the ancients, it was a fundamental principle, and frequently inculcated, "*Quod omnibus disciplinis et artibus debet esse instructus orator*;" that the orator ought to be an accomplished scholar, and conversant in every part of learning. It is indeed impossible to contrive an

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\* The author was the first who read lectures on this subject in the University of Edinburgh. He began with reading them in a private character, in the year 1759. In the following year, he was chosen Professor of Rhetoric by the Magistrates and Town-council of Edinburgh; and, in 1762, his Majesty was pleased to erect and endow a Profession of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in that University; and the author was appointed the first Regius Professor.



art, and very pernicious it were if it could be contrived, which should give the stamp of merit to any composition rich or splendid in expression, but barren or erroneous in thought. They are the wretched attempts towards an art of this kind, which have so often disgraced oratory, and debased it below its true standard. The graces of composition have been employed to disguise or to supply the want of matter; and the temporary applause of the ignorant has been courted, instead of the lasting approbation of the discerning. But such imposture can never maintain its ground long. Knowledge and science must furnish the materials that form the body and substance of any valuable composition. Rhetoric serves to add the polish; and we know that none but firm and solid bodies can be polished well.

Of those who peruse the following Lectures, some, in consequence either of their profession, or of their prevailing inclination, may have the view of being employed in composition, or in public speaking; others, without any prospect of this kind, may wish only to improve their taste with respect to writing and discourse, and to acquire principles which will enable them to judge for themselves in that part of literature called the Belles Lettres.

With respect to the former, such as may have occasion to communicate their sentiments to the public, it is abundantly clear that some preparation

of study is requisite for the end which they have in view. To speak or to write perspicuously and agreeably, with purity, with grace and strength, are attainments of the utmost consequence to all who propose, either by speech or writing, to address the public. For without being master of those attainments, no man can do justice to his own conceptions; but how rich soever he may be in knowledge and in good sense, will be able to avail himself less of those treasures, than such as possess not half his store, but who can display what they possess with more propriety. Neither are these attainments of that kind for which we are indebted to Nature merely. Nature has, indeed, conferred upon some a very favourable distinction in this respect beyond others. But in these, as in most other talents she bestows, she has left much to be wrought out by every man's own industry. So conspicuous have been the effects of study and improvement in every part of eloquence; such remarkable examples have appeared of persons surmounting, by their diligence, the disadvantages of the most untoward nature; that, among the learned, it has long been a contested, and remains still an undecided point, whether nature or art confer most towards excelling in writing and discourse.

With respect to the manner in which art can most effectually furnish assistance for such a purpose, there may be diversity of opinions. I by no

means pretend to say, that mere rhetorical rules, how just soever, are sufficient to form an orator. Supposing natural genius to be favourable, more, by a great deal, will depend upon private application and study, than upon any system of instruction that is capable of being publicly communicated. But at the same time, though rules and instructions cannot do all that is requisite, they may, however, do much that is of real use. They cannot, it is true, inspire genius; but they can direct and assist it. They cannot remedy barrenness; but they may correct redundancy. They point out proper models for imitation. They bring into view the chief beauties that ought to be studied, and the principal faults that ought to be avoided; and thereby tend to enlighten taste, and to lead genius, from unnatural deviations, into its proper channel. What would not avail for the production of great excellencies, may at least serve to prevent the commission of considerable errors.

All that regards the study of eloquence and composition, merits the higher attention upon this account, that it is intimately connected with the improvement of our intellectual powers. For I must be allowed to say, that when we are employed, after a proper manner, in the study of composition, we are cultivating reason itself. True rhetoric and sound logic are very nearly allied. The study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches to think, as well as to speak ac-

curately. By putting our sentiments into words, we always conceive them more distinctly. Every one who has the slightest acquaintance with composition knows, that when he expresses himself ill on any subject, when his arrangement is loose, and his sentences become feeble, the defects of his style can, almost on every occasion, be traced back to his indistinct conception of the subject ; so close is the connection between thoughts, and the words in which they are clothed.

The study of composition, important in itself at all times, has acquired additional importance from the taste and manners of the present age. It is an age wherein improvements, in every part of science, have been prosecuted with ardour. To all the liberal arts much attention has been paid ; and to none more than to the beauty of language, and the grace and elegance of every kind of writing. The public ear is become refined. It will not easily bear what is slovenly and incorrect. Every author must aspire to some merit in expression, as well as in sentiment, if he would not incur the danger of being neglected and despised.

I will not deny that the love of minute elegance, and attention to inferior ornaments of composition, may at present have engrossed too great a degree of the public regard. It is indeed my opinion, that we lean to this extreme ; often more careful of polished style, than of storing it with thought.

Yet hence arises a new reason for the study of just and proper composition. If it be requisite not to be deficient in elegance or ornament in times when they are in such high estimation, it is still more requisite to attain the power of distinguishing false ornament from true, in order to prevent our being carried away by that torrent of false and frivolous taste, which never fails, when it is prevalent, to sweep along with it the raw and the ignorant. They who have never studied eloquence in its principles, nor have been trained to attend to the genuine and manly beauties of good writing, are always ready to be caught by the mere glare of language; and when they come to speak in public, or to compose, have no other standard on which to form themselves, except what chances to be fashionable and popular, how corrupted soever, and erroneous, that may be.

But as there are many who have no such objects as either composition or public speaking in view, let us next consider what advantages may be derived by them, from such studies as form the subject of these Lectures. To them rhetoric is not so much a practical art as a speculative science; and the same instructions which assist others in composing, will assist them in discerning and relishing the beauties of composition. Whatever enables genius to execute well, will enable taste to criticise justly.



When we name criticising, prejudices may perhaps arise, of the same kind with those which I mentioned before with respect to rhetoric. As rhetoric has been sometimes thought to signify nothing more than the scholastic study of words, and phrases, and tropes, so criticism has been considered as merely the art of finding faults; as the frigid application of certain technical terms, by means of which persons are taught to cavil and censure in a learned manner. But this is the criticism of pedants only. True criticism is a liberal and humane art. It is the offspring of good sense and refined taste. It aims at acquiring a just discernment of the real merit of authors. It promotes a lively relish of their beauties, while it preserves us from that blind and implicit veneration which would confound their beauties and faults in our esteem. It teaches us, in a word, to admire and to blame with judgment, and not to follow the crowd blindly.

In an age when works of genius and literature are so frequently the subjects of discourse, when every one erects himself into a judge, and when we can hardly mingle in polite society without bearing some share in such discussions; studies of this kind, it is not to be doubted, will appear to derive part of their importance from the use to which they may be applied in furnishing materials for those fashionable topics of discourse, and thereby enabling us to support a proper rank in social life.

But I should be sorry if we could not rest the merit of such studies on somewhat of solid and intrinsical use, independent of appearance and show. The exercise of taste and of sound criticism is, in truth, one of the most improving employments of the understanding. To apply the principles of good sense to composition and discourse; to examine what is beautiful, and why it is so; to employ ourselves in distinguishing accurately between the specious and the solid, between affected and natural ornament, must certainly improve us not a little in the most valuable part of all philosophy, the philosophy of human nature. For such disquisitions are very intimately connected with the knowledge of ourselves. They necessarily lead us to reflect on the operations of the imagination, and the movements of the heart; and increase our acquaintance with some of the most refined feelings which belong to our frame.

Logical and ethical disquisitions move in a higher sphere, and are conversant with objects of a more severe kind; the progress of the understanding in its search after knowledge, and the direction of the will in the proper pursuit of good. They point out to man the improvement of his nature as an intelligent being; and his duties as the subject of moral obligation. Belles Lettres and criticism chiefly consider him as a being endowed with those powers of taste and imagination, which were intended to embellish his mind, and to sup-

ply him with rational and useful entertainment. They open a field of investigation peculiar to themselves. All that relates to beauty, harmony, grandeur, and elegance; all that can soothe the mind, gratify the fancy, or move the affections, belongs to their province. They present human nature under a different aspect from that which it assumes when viewed by other sciences. They bring to light various springs of action, which, without their aid, might have passed unobserved; and which, though of a delicate nature, frequently exert a powerful influence on several departments of human life.

Such studies have also this peculiar advantage, that they exercise our reason without fatiguing it. They lead to inquiries acute, but not painful; profound, but not dry nor abstruse. They strew flowers in the path of science; and while they keep the mind bent in some degree, and active, they relieve it, at the same time, from that more toilsome labour to which it must submit in the acquisition of necessary erudition, or the investigation of abstract truth.

The cultivation of taste is farther recommended by the happy effects which it naturally tends to produce on human life. The most busy man, in the most active sphere, cannot be always occupied by business. Men of serious professions cannot always be on the stretch of serious thought. Nei-



ther can the most gay and flourishing situations of fortune afford any man the power of filling all his hours with pleasure. Life must always languish in the hands of the idle. It will frequently languish even in the hands of the busy, if they have not some employment subsidiary to that which forms their main pursuit. How then shall these vacant spaces, those unemployed intervals, which, more or less, occur in the life of every one, be filled up? How can we contrive to dispose of them in any way that shall be more agreeable in itself, or more consonant to the dignity of the human mind, than in the entertainments of taste, and the study of polite literature? He who is so happy as to have acquired a relish for these, has always at hand an innocent and irreproachable amusement for his leisure hours, to save him from the danger of many a pernicious passion. He is not in hazard of being a burden to himself. He is not obliged to fly to low company, or to court the riot of loose pleasures, in order to cure the tediousness of existence.

Providence seems plainly to have pointed out this useful purpose to which the pleasures of taste may be applied, by interposing them in a middle station between the pleasures of sense and those of pure intellect. We were not designed to grovel always among objects so low as the former; nor are we capable of dwelling constantly in so high a region as the latter. The pleasures of taste refresh the mind after the toils of the intellect, and the

labours of abstract study ; and they gradually raise it above the attachments of sense, and prepare it for the enjoyments of virtue.

So consonant is this to experience, that, in the education of youth, no object has in every age appeared more important to wise men, than to tincture them early with a relish for the entertainments of taste. The transition is commonly made with ease from these to the discharge of the higher and more important duties of life. Good hopes may be entertained of those whose minds have this liberal and elegant turn. It is favourable to many virtues. Whereas, to be entirely devoid of relish for eloquence, poetry, or any of the fine arts, is justly construed to be an unpromising symptom of youth ; and raises suspicions of their being prone to low gratifications, or destined to drudge in the more vulgar and illiberal pursuits of life.

There are indeed few good dispositions of any kind with which the improvement of taste is not more or less connected. A cultivated taste increases sensibility to all the tender and humane passions, by giving them frequent exercise ; while it tends to weaken the more violent and fierce emotions.

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— Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes  
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros \*.

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\* These polish'd arts have humaniz'd mankind,  
Soft'n'd the rude, and calm'd the boist'rous mind.

The elevated sentiments and high examples which poetry, eloquence, and history, are often bringing under our view, naturally tend to nourish in our minds public spirit, the love of glory, contempt of external fortune, and the admiration of what is truly illustrious and great.

I will not go so far as to say that the improvement of taste and of virtue is the same; or that they may always be expected to co-exist in an equal degree. More powerful correctives than taste can apply, are necessary for reformatting the corrupt propensities which too frequently prevail among mankind. Elegant speculations are sometimes found to float on the surface of the mind, while bad passions possess the interior regions of the heart. At the same time this cannot but be admitted, that the exercise of taste is, in its native tendency, moral and purifying. From reading the most admired productions of genius, whether in poetry or prose, almost every one rises with some good impressions left on his mind: and though these may not always be durable, they are at least to be ranked among the means of disposing the heart to virtue. One thing is certain, and I shall hereafter have occasion to illustrate it more fully, that, without possessing the virtuous affections in a strong degree, no man can attain eminence in the sublime parts of eloquence. He must feel what a good man feels, if he expects greatly to move, or to interest mankind. They are the ar-

dent sentiments of honour, virtue, magnanimity, and public spirit, that only can kindle that fire of genius, and call up into the mind those high ideas, which attract the admiration of ages; and if this spirit be necessary to produce the most distinguished efforts of eloquence, it must be necessary also to our relishing them with proper taste and feeling.

On these general topics I shall dwell no longer; but proceed directly to the consideration of the subjects which are to employ the following Lectures: They divide themselves into five parts. First, Some introductory dissertations on the Nature of Taste, and upon the Sources of its Pleasures: Secondly, The consideration of Language: Thirdly, Of Style: Fourthly, Of Eloquence properly so called, or Public Speaking in its different kinds: Lastly, A critical examination of the most distinguished Species of Composition, both in prose and verse.

## LECTURE II.

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### TASTE.

**T**HE nature of the present undertaking leads me to begin with some inquiries concerning taste, as it is this faculty which is always appealed to in disquisitions concerning the merit of discourse and writing.

There are few subjects on which men talk more loosely and indistinctly than on taste ; few which it is more difficult to explain with precision ; and none which in this Course of Lectures will appear more dry or abstract. What I have to say on the subject, shall be in the following order. I shall first explain the Nature of Taste as a power of faculty in the human mind. I shall next consider how far it is an improveable faculty. I shall shew the sources of its improvement, and the characters of taste in its most perfect state. I shall then examine the various fluctuations to which it is liable, and inquire whether there be any standard to



which we can bring the different tastes of men, in order to distinguish the corrupted from the true.

Taste may be defined, "The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art." The first question that occurs concerning it is, whether it is to be considered as an internal sense, or as an exertion of reason? Reason is a very general term; but if we understand by it that power of the mind which in speculative matters discovers truth, and in practical matters judges of the fitness of means to an end, I apprehend the question may be easily answered. For nothing can be more clear, than that taste is not resolvable into any such operation of reason. It is not merely through a discovery of the understanding, or a deduction of argument, that the mind receives pleasure from a beautiful prospect or a fine poem. Such objects often strike us intuitively, and make a strong impression, when we are unable to assign the reasons of our being pleased. They sometimes strike in the same manner the philosopher and the peasant; the boy and the man. Hence the faculty by which we relish such beauties, seems more clearly allied to a feeling of sense, than to a process of the understanding; and accordingly, from an external sense it has borrowed its name; that sense by which we receive and distinguish the pleasures of food having, in several languages, given rise to the word taste in the metaphorical meaning under which we now consider



it. However, as in all subjects which regard the operations of the mind, the inaccurate use of words is to be carefully avoided, it must not be inferred, from what I have said, that reason is entirely excluded from the exertions of taste. Though taste, beyond doubt, be ultimately founded on a certain natural and instinctive sensibility to beauty, yet reason, as I shall shew hereafter, assists taste in many of its operations, and serves to enlarge its power\*.

Taste, in the sense in which I have explained it, is a faculty common in some degree to all men. Nothing that belongs to human nature is more general than the relish of beauty of one kind or other; of what is orderly, proportioned, grand, harmonious, new, or sprightly. In children, the rudiments of taste discover themselves very early in a thousand instances; in their fondness for regular bodies, their admiration of pictures and statues, and imitations of all kinds; and their strong attachment to whatever is new or marvellous. The most ignorant peasants are delighted with ballads and tales, and are struck with the beautiful appearance of nature in the earth and heavens. Even in the deserts of America, where human nature

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\* See Dr Gerard's Essay on Taste.—D'Alembert's Reflections on the Use and Abuse of Philosophy in matters which relate to Taste.—*Reflections Critiques sur la Poesië et sur la Peinture*, tome ii. ch. 22—31.—*Elements of Criticism*, c. 25.—Mr Hume's Essay on the Standard of Taste.—Introduction to the Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful.

shews itself in its most uncultivated state, the savages have their ornaments of dress, their war and their death songs, their harangues and their orators. We must, therefore, conclude the principles of taste to be deeply founded in the human mind. It is no less essential to man to have some discernment of beauty, than it is to possess the attributes of reason and of speech \*.

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\* On the subject of taste, considered as a power or faculty of the mind, much less is to be found among the ancient than among the modern rhetorical and critical writers. The following remarkable passage in Cicero serves however to shew, that his ideas on this subject agree perfectly with what has been said above. He is speaking of the beauties of style and numbers: “ *Illud autem nequis admiretur quonam modo hæc vulgus imperitorum in audiendo, notet; cum in omni genere, tum in hoc ipso, magna quædam est vis, incredibilisque naturæ. Omnes enim tacito quodam sensu, sine ulle arte aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus de rationibus recta et prava dijudicant: idque cum faciunt in picturis, et in signis, et in aliis operibus, ad quonam intelligentiam a natura minus habent instrumenti, tum multo ostendunt magis in verborum, numerorum, vocumque judicio; quod ea sunt in communibus infixis sensibus; neque earum rerum quenquam funditus natura voluit esse expertem.*” Cic. de Orat. lib. iii. cap. 50. edit. Gruteri.—Quintilian seems to include taste (for which, in the sense which we now give to that word, the ancients appear to have had no distinct name) under what he calls *judicium*. “ *Locus de judicio, meâ quidem opinione adeo partibus hujus operis omnibus connectus ac mistus est, ut ne a sententiis quidem aut verbis saltem singulis possit separari, nec magis arte traditur, quam gustus aut odor.*—*Ut contraria vitemus et communia, ne quid in eloquendo corruptum obscurumque sit, referatur oportet ad sensus qui non docentur.*” Institut. lib. vi. cap. 3. edit. Obrechtii.

But although none be wholly devoid of this faculty, yet the degrees in which it is possessed are widely different. In some men only the feeble glimmerings of taste appear: the beauties which they relish are of the coarsest kind; and of these they have but a weak and confused impression: while in others, taste rises to an acute discernment, and a lively enjoyment of the most refined beauties. In general, we may observe, that in the powers and pleasures of taste, there is a more remarkable inequality among men, than is usually found in point of common sense, reason, and judgment. The constitution of our nature in this, as in all other respects, discovers admirable wisdom. In the distribution of those talents which are necessary for man's well being, Nature hath made less distinction among her children. But in the distribution of those which belong only to the ornamental part of life, she hath bestowed her favours with more frugality. She hath both sown the seeds more sparingly, and rendered a higher culture requisite for bringing them to perfection.

This inequality of taste among men is owing, without doubt, in part, to the different frame of their natures; to nicer organs, and finer internal powers, with which some are endowed beyond others. But, if it be owing in part to Nature, it is owing to education and culture still more. The illustration of this leads to my next remark on this subject, that taste is a most improveable faculty, if

there be any such in human nature ; a remark which gives great encouragement to such a course of study as we are now proposing to pursue. Of the truth of this assertion we may easily be convinced, by only reflecting on that immense superiority which education and improvement give to civilized above barbarous nations, in refinement of taste : and on the superiority which they give in the same nation to those who have studied the liberal arts, above the rude and untaught vulgar. The difference is so great, that there is perhaps no one particular in which these two classes of men are so far removed from each other, as in respect of the powers and the pleasures of taste ; and assuredly, for this difference no other general cause can be assigned but culture and education.—I shall now proceed to shew what the means are by which taste becomes so remarkably susceptible of cultivation and progress.

Reflect first upon that great law of our nature, that exercise is the chief source of improvement in all our faculties. This holds both in our bodily, and in our mental powers. It holds even in our external senses ; although these be less the subject of cultivation than any of our other faculties. We see how acute the senses become in persons whose trade or business leads to nice exertions of them. Touch, for instance, becomes infinitely more exquisite in men whose employment requires them to examine the polish of bodies, than it is in

others. They who deal in microscopical observations, or are accustomed to engrave on precious stones, acquire surprising accuracy of sight in discerning the minutest objects; and practice in attending to different flavours and tastes of liquors, wonderfully improves the power of distinguishing them, and of tracing their composition. Placing internal taste, therefore, on the footing of a simple sense, it cannot be doubted that frequent exercise and curious attention to its proper objects, must greatly heighten its power. Of this we have one clear proof in that part of taste which is called an ear for music. Experience every day shews, that nothing is more improveable. Only the simplest and plainest compositions are relished at first; use and practice extend our pleasure; teach us to relish finer melody, and by degrees enable us to enter into the intricate and compounded pleasures of harmony. So an eye for the beauties of painting is never all at once acquired. It is gradually formed by being conversant among pictures, and studying the works of the best masters.

Precisely in the same manner, with respect to the beauty of composition and discourse, attention to the most approved models, study of the best authors, comparisons of lower and higher degrees of the same beauties, operate towards the refinement of taste. When one is only beginning his acquaintance with works of genius, the sentiment which attends them is obscure and confused. He



cannot point out the several excellencies or blemishes of a performance which he peruses ; he is at a loss on what to rest his judgment ; all that can be expected is, that he should tell in general whether he be pleased or not. But allow him more experience in works of this kind, and his taste becomes by degrees more exact and enlightened. He begins to perceive not only the character of the whole, but the beauties and defects of each part ; and is able to describe the peculiar qualities which he praises or blames. The mist is dissipated which seemed formerly to hang over the object ; and he can at length pronounce firmly, and without hesitation, concerning it. Thus, taste, considered as mere sensibility, exercise opens a great source of improvement.

But although taste be ultimately founded on sensibility, it must not be considered as instinctive sensibility alone. Reason and good sense, as I before hinted, have so extensive an influence on all the operations and decisions of taste, that a thorough good taste may well be considered as a power compounded of natural sensibility to beauty, and of improved understanding. In order to be satisfied of this, let us observe, that the greater part of the productions of genius are no other than imitations of nature ; representations of the characters, actions, or manners of men. The pleasure we receive from such imitations or representations is founded on mere taste ; but to judge

whether they be properly executed, belongs to the understanding, which compares the copy with the original.

In reading, for instance, such a poem as the *Æneid*, a great part of our pleasure arises from the plan or story being well conducted, and all the parts joined together with probability and due connection; from the characters being taken from nature, the sentiments being suited to the characters, and the style to the sentiments. The pleasure which arises from a poem so conducted, is felt or enjoyed by taste as an internal sense; but the discovery of this conduct in the poem is owing to reason; and the more that reason enables us to discover such propriety in the conduct, the greater will be our pleasure. We are pleased, through our natural sense of beauty. Reason shews us why, and upon what grounds, we are pleased. Wherever, in works of taste, any resemblance to nature is aimed at; wherever there is any reference of parts to a whole; or of means to an end, as there is indeed in almost every writing and discourse; there the understanding must always have a great part to act.

Here then is a wide field for reason's exerting its powers in relation to the objects of taste, particularly with respect to composition, and works of genius; and hence arises a second and a very considerable source of the improvement of taste, from the application of reason and good sense

to such productions of genius. Spurious beauties, such as unnatural characters, forced sentiments, affected style, may please for a little; but they please only because their opposition to nature and to good sense has not been examined, or attended to. Once shew how nature might have been more justly imitated or represented; how the writer might have managed his subject to greater advantage; the illusion will presently be dissipated, and these false beauties will please no more.

From these two sources then, first, the frequent exercises of taste, and next the application of good sense and reason to the objects of taste, taste as a power of the mind receives its improvement. In its perfect state, it is undoubtedly the result both of nature and of art. It supposes our natural sense of beauty to be refined by frequent attention to the most beautiful objects, and at the same time to be guided and improved by the light of the understanding.

I must be allowed to add, that as a sound head, so likewise a good heart, is a very material requisite to just taste. The moral beauties are not only in themselves superior to all others, but they exert an influence, either more near or more remote, on a great variety of other objects of taste. Wherever the affections, characters, or actions of men are concerned (and these certainly afford the noblest subjects to genius), there can be neither any just or affecting description of them, nor any

thorough feeling of the beauty of that description, without our possessing the virtuous affections. He whose heart is indelicate or hard, he who has no admiration of what is truly noble or praiseworthy, nor the proper sympathetic sense of what is soft and tender, must have a very imperfect relish of the highest beauties of eloquence and poetry.

The characters of taste, when brought to its most improved state, are all reducible to two, Delicacy and Correctness.

Delicacy of taste respects principally the perfection of that natural sensibility on which taste is founded. It implies those finer organs or powers which enable us to discover beauties that lie hid from a vulgar eye. One may have strong sensibility, and yet be deficient in delicate taste. He may be deeply impressed by such beauties as he perceives; but he perceives only what is in some degree coarse, what is bold and palpable; while chaster and simpler ornaments escape his notice. In this state taste generally exists among rude and unrefined nations. But a person of delicate taste both feels strongly and feels accurately. He sees distinctions and differences where others see none; the most latent beauty does not escape him, and he is sensible of the smallest blemish. Delicacy of taste is judged of by the same marks that we use in judging of the delicacy of an external sense. As the goodness of the palate is not tried by strong flavours, but by a mixture of ingredients, where, not-

withstanding the confusion, we remain sensible of each ; in like manner, delicacy of internal taste appears, by a quick and lively sensibility to its finest, most compounded, or most latent objects.

Correctness of taste respects chiefly the improvement which that faculty receives through its connection with the understanding. A man of correct taste is one who is never imposed on by counterfeit beauties ; who carries always in his mind that standard of good sense which he employs in judging of every thing. He estimates with propriety the comparative merit of the several beauties which he meets with in any work of genius ; refers them to their proper classes ; assigns the principles, as far as they can be traced, whence their power of pleasing flows ; and is pleased himself precisely in that degree in which he ought, and no more.

It is true that these two qualities of taste, delicacy and correctness, mutually imply each other. No taste can be exquisitely delicate without being correct ; nor can be thoroughly correct without being delicate. But still a predominancy of one or other quality in the mixture is often visible. The power of delicacy is chiefly seen in discerning the true merit of a work ; the power of correctness, in rejecting false pretensions to merit. Delicacy leans more to feeling ; correctness more to reason and judgment. The former is more the gift of Nature ; the latter, more the product of culture



and art. Among the ancient critics, Longinus possessed most delicacy ; Aristotle, most correctness. Among the moderns, Mr Addison is a high example of delicate taste ; Dean Swift, had he written on the subject of criticism, would perhaps have afforded the example of a correct one.

Having viewed taste in its most improved and perfect state, I come next to consider its deviations from that state, the fluctuations and changes to which it is liable ; and to inquire whether, in the midst of these, there be any means of distinguishing a true from a corrupted taste. This brings us to the most difficult part of our task. For it must be acknowledged, that no principle of the human mind is, in its operations, more fluctuating and capricious than taste. Its variations have been so great and frequent, as to create a suspicion with some, of its being merely arbitrary ; grounded on no foundation, ascertainable by no standard, but wholly dependent on changing fancy ; the consequence of which would be, that all studies or regular inquiries concerning the objects of taste were vain. In architecture, the Grecian models were long esteemed the most perfect. In succeeding ages, the Gothic architecture alone prevailed, and afterwards the Grecian taste revived in all its vigour, and engrossed the public admiration. In eloquence and poetry, the Asiatics at no time relished any thing but what was full of ornament, and splendid in a degree that we should denominate gawdy ; whilst the Greeks admired only chaste and

simple beauties, and despised the Asiatic ostentation. In our own country, how many writings that were greatly extolled two or three centuries ago, are now fallen into entire disrepute and oblivion? Without going back to remote instances, how very different is the taste of poetry which prevails in Great Britain now, from what prevailed there no longer ago than the reign of King Charles II. with the authors too of that time deemed an Augustan age; when nothing was in vogue but an affected brilliancy of wit; when the simple majesty of Milton was overlooked, and *Paradise Lost* almost entirely unknown; when Cowley's laboured and unnatural conceits were admired as the very quintessence of genius; Waller's gay sprightliness was mistaken for the tender spirit of love poetry; and such writers as Suckling and Etheridge were held in esteem for dramatic composition.

The question is, what conclusion we are to form from such instances as these? Is there any thing that can be called a standard of taste, by appealing to which we may distinguish between a good and a bad taste? Or is there in truth no such distinction; and are we to hold that, according to the proverb, there is no disputing of tastes; but that whatever pleases is right, for that reason, that it does please? This is the question, and a very nice and subtle one it is, which we are now to discuss.

I begin by observing, that if there be no such thing as any standard of taste, this consequence must immediately follow, that all tastes are equally good ; a position which, though it may pass unnoticed in slight matters, and when we speak of the lesser differences among the tastes of men, yet when we apply it to the extremes, presently shews its absurdity. For is there any one who will seriously maintain that the taste of a Hottentot or a Laplander is as delicate and as correct as that of a Longinus or an Addison ? or, that he can be charged with no defect or incapacity, who thinks a common news-writer as excellent an historian as Tacitus ? As it would be held downright extravagance to talk in this manner, we are led unavoidably to this conclusion, and there is some foundation for the preference of one man's taste to that of another ; or that there is a good and a bad, a right and a wrong, in taste, as in other things.

But to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe next, that the diversity of tastes which prevails among mankind, does not in every case infer corruption of taste, or oblige us to seek for some standard in order to determine who are in the right. The tastes of men may differ very considerably as to their object, and yet none of them be wrong. One man relishes poetry most ; another takes pleasure in nothing but history. One prefers comedy ; another tragedy. One admires the simple ; another the ornamented style. The young are amused with gay and

sprightly compositions. The elderly are more entertained with those of a graver cast. Some nations delight in bold pictures of manners, and strong representations of passion. Others incline to more correct and regular elegance both in description and sentiment. Though all differ, yet all pitch upon some one beauty which peculiarly suits their turn of mind ; and therefore no one has a title to condemn the rest. It is not in matters of taste, as in questions of mere reason, where there is but one conclusion that can be true, and all the rest are erroneous. Truth, which is the object of reason, is one ; beauty, which is the object of taste, is manifold. Taste, therefore, admits of latitude and diversity of objects, in sufficient consistency with goodness or justness of taste.

But then, to explain this matter thoroughly, I must observe farther, that this admissible diversity of tastes can only have place where the objects of taste are different. Where it is with respect to the same object that men disagree, when one condemns that as ugly, which another admires as highly beautiful, then it is no longer diversity, but direct opposition of taste, that takes place ; and therefore one must be in the right, and another in the wrong, unless that absurd paradox were allowed to hold, that all tastes are equally good and true. One man prefers Virgil to Homer. Suppose that I, on the other hand, admire Homer more than Virgil. I have as yet no reason to say that our tastes are contradictory. The other person is more



struck with the elegance and tenderness which are the characteristics of Virgil : I, with the simplicity and fire of Homer. As long as neither of us deny that both Homer and Virgil have great beauties, our difference falls within the compass of that diversity of tastes, which I have shewn to be natural and allowable. But if the other man shall assert that Homer has no beauties whatever ; that he holds him to be a dull and spiritless writer ; and that he would as soon peruse any old legend of knight-errantry as the Iliad ; then I exclaim, that my antagonist either is void of all taste, or that his taste is corrupted in a miserable degree ; and I appeal to whatever I think the standard of taste, to shew him that he is in the wrong.

What that standard is, to which, in such opposition of tastes, we are obliged to have recourse, remains to be traced. A standard properly signifies, that which is of such undoubted authority as to be the test of other things of the same kind. Thus a standard weight or measure is that which is appointed by law to regulate all other measures and weights. Thus the court is said to be the standard of good breeding ; and the scripture, of theological truth.

When we say that nature is the standard of taste, we lay down a principle very true and just, as far as it can be applied. There is no doubt, that in all cases where an imitation is intended of some object that exists in nature, as in represent-



ing human characters or actions, conformity to nature affords a full and distinct criterion of what is truly beautiful. Reason hath in such cases full scope for exerting its authority, for approving or condemning, by comparing the copy with the original. But there are innumerable cases in which this rule cannot be at all applied ; and conformity to nature, is an expression frequently used without any distinct or determinate meaning. We must therefore search for somewhat that can be rendered more clear and precise, to be the standard of taste.

Taste, as I before explained it, is ultimately founded on an internal sense of beauty, which is natural to men, and which, in its application to particular objects, is capable of being guided and enlightened by reason. Now, were there any one person who possessed in full perfection all the powers of human nature, whose internal senses were in every instance exquisite and just, and whose reason was unerring and sure, the determinations of such a person concerning beauty, would, beyond doubt, be a perfect standard for the taste of all others. Wherever their taste differed from his, it could only be imputed to some imperfection in their natural powers. But as there is no such living standard, no one person to whom all mankind will allow such submission to be due, what is there of sufficient authority to be the standard of the various and opposite tastes of men ; most certainly there is nothing but the taste, as far as it

can be gathered, of human nature. That which men concur the most in admiring must be held to be beautiful. His taste must be esteemed just and true, which coincides with the general sentiments of men. In this standard we must rest. To the sense of mankind the ultimate appeal must ever lie, in all works of taste. If any one should maintain that sugar was bitter, and tobacco was sweet, no reasonings could avail to prove it. The taste of such a person would infallibly be held to be diseased, merely because it differed so widely from the taste of the species to which he belongs. In like manner, with regard to the objects of sentiment or internal taste, the common feelings of men carry the same authority, and have a title to regulate the taste of every individual.

But have we then, it will be said, no other criterion of what is beautiful than the approbation of the majority? Must we collect the voices of others, before we form any judgment for ourselves, of what deserves applause in eloquence or poetry? By no means; there are principles of reason and sound judgment which can be applied to matters of taste as well as to the subjects of science and philosophy. He who admires or censures any work of genius, is always ready, if his taste be in any degree improved, to assign some reasons for his decision. He appeals to principles, and points out the grounds on which he proceeds. Taste is a sort of compound power, in which the light of the

understanding always mingles, more or less, with the feelings of sentiment.

But, though reason can carry us a certain length in judging concerning works of taste, it is not to be forgotten that the ultimate conclusions to which our reasonings lead, refer at last to sense and perception. We may speculate and argue concerning propriety of conduct in a tragedy, or an epic poem. Just reasonings on the subject will correct the caprice of unenlightened taste, and establish principles for judging of what deserves praise. But, at the same time, these reasonings appeal always, in the last resort, to feeling. The foundation upon which they rest, is what has been found from experience to please mankind universally. Upon this ground we prefer a simple and natural, to an artificial and affected style; a regular and well connected story, to loose and scattered narratives; a catastrophe which is tender and pathetic, to one which leaves us unmoved. It is from consulting our own imagination and heart, and from attending to the feelings of others, that any principles are formed which acquire authority in matters of taste \*.

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\* The difference between the authors who found the standard of taste upon the common feelings of human nature, ascertained by general approbation, and those who found it upon established principles which can be ascertained by reason, is more an apparent than a real difference. Like many other literary controversies it turns chiefly on modes of expression. For they

When we refer to the concurring sentiments of men as the ultimate test of what is to be accounted beautiful in the arts, this is to be always understood of men placed in such situations as are favourable to the proper exertions of taste. Every one must perceive, that among rude and uncivilized nations, and during the ages of ignorance and darkness, any loose notions that are entertained concerning such subjects carry no authority. In those states of society, taste has no materials on which to operate. It is either totally suppressed, or appears in its lowest and most imperfect form. We refer to the sentiments of mankind in polished and flourishing nations; when arts are cultivated and manners refined; when works of genius are subjected to free discussion, and taste is improved by science and philosophy.

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who lay the greatest stress on sentiment and feeling, make no scruple of applying argument and reason to matters of taste. They appeal, like other writers, to established principles, in judging of the excellencies of eloquence or poetry; and plainly shew, that the general approbation to which they ultimately recur, is an approbation resulting from discussion as well as from sentiment. They, on the other hand, who, in order to vindicate taste from any suspicion of being arbitrary, maintain that it is ascertainable by the standard of reason, admit nevertheless, that what pleases universally, must on that account be held to be truly beautiful; and that no rules or conclusions concerning objects of taste can have any just authority, if they be found to contradict the general sentiments of men. These two systems, therefore, differ in reality very little from one another. Sentiment and reason enter into both; and by allowing to each of these powers its due place, both systems may be rendered consistent. Accordingly, it is in this light that I have endeavoured to place the subject.



Even among nations, at such a period of society, I admit, that accidental causes may occasionally warp the proper operations of taste ; sometimes the state of religion, sometimes the form of government, may for a while pervert it ; a licentious court may introduce a taste for false ornaments and dissolute writings. The usage of one admired genius may procure approbation for his faults, and even render them fashionable. Sometimes envy may have power to bear down, for a little, productions of great merit ; while popular humour, or party spirit, may, at other times, exalt to a high, though short-lived reputation, what little deserved it. But though such casual circumstances give the appearance of caprice to the judgments of taste, that appearance is easily corrected. In the course of time, the genuine taste of human nature never fails to disclose itself, and to gain the ascendant over any fantastic and corrupted modes of taste which may chance to have been introduced. These may have currency for a while, and mislead superficial judges ; but being subjected to examination, by degrees they pass away ; while that alone remains which is founded on sound reason, and the native feelings of men.

I by no means pretend, that there is any standard of taste, to which, in every particular instance, we can resort for clear and immediate determination. Where, indeed, is such a standard to be found for deciding any of those great controversies in reason and



philosophy, which perpetually divide mankind? In the present case, there was plainly no occasion for any such strict and absolute provision to be made. In order to judge of what is morally good or evil, of what man ought, or ought not in duty to do; it was fit that the means of clear and precise determination should be afforded us. But to ascertain in every case with the utmost exactness what is beautiful or elegant, was not at all necessary to the happiness of man. And therefore some diversity in feeling was here allowed to take place; and room was left for discussion and debate; concerning the degree of approbation to which any work of genius is entitled.

The conclusion which it is sufficient for us to rest upon is, that taste is far from being an arbitrary principle, which is subject to the fancy of every individual, and which admits of no criterion for determining whether it be false or true. Its foundation is the same in all human minds. It is built upon sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature; and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our other intellectual principles. When these sentiments are perverted by ignorance and prejudice, they are capable of being rectified by reason. Their sound and natural state is ultimately determined, by comparing them with the general taste of mankind. Let men declaim as much as they please, concerning the caprice and the uncertainty of taste, it is found

by experience, that there are beauties, which, if they be displayed in a proper light, have power to command lasting and general admiration. In every composition, what interests the imagination, and touches the heart, pleases all ages and all nations. There is a certain string to which, when properly struck, the human heart is so made as to answer.

Hence the universal testimony which the most improved nations of the earth have conspired, throughout a long tract of ages, to give to some few works of genius ; such as the *Iliad* of Homer and the *Æneid* of Virgil. Hence the authority which such works have acquired as standards, in some degree, of poetical composition ; since from them we are enabled to collect what the sense of mankind is, concerning those beauties which give them the highest pleasure, and which therefore poetry ought to exhibit. Authority or prejudice may, in one age or country, give a temporary reputation to an indifferent poet, or a bad artist ; but when foreigners, or when posterity, examine his works, his faults are decerned, and the genuine taste of human nature appears, "*Opinionum commenta delet dies ; naturæ judicia confirmat.*" Time overthrows the illusions of opinion, but establishes the decisions of nature.

### LECTURE III.

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#### CRITICISM.—GENIUS.—PLEASURES OF TASTE.— SUBLIMITY IN OBJECTS.

TASTE, criticism, and genius, are words currently employed, without distinct ideas annexed to them. In beginning a course of Lectures where such words must often occur, it is necessary to ascertain their meaning with some precision. Having in the last lecture treated of taste, I proceed to explain the nature and foundation of criticism. True criticism is the application of taste and of good sense to the several fine arts. The object which it proposes is, to distinguish what is beautiful and what is faulty in every performance; from particular instances to ascend to general principles; and so to form rules or conclusions concerning the several kinds of beauty in works of genius.

The rules of criticism are not formed by any induction, *à priori*, as it is called; that is, they

are not formed by a train of abstract reasoning, independent of facts and observations. Criticism is an art founded wholly on experience; on the observations of such beauties as have come nearest to the standard which I before established; that is, of such beauties that have been found to please mankind most generally. For example, Aristotle's rules concerning the unity of action in dramatic and epic composition, were not rules first discovered by logical reasoning, and then applied to poetry; but they were drawn from the practice of Homer and Sophocles: they were founded upon observing the superior pleasure which we receive from the relation of an action which is one and entire, beyond what we receive from the relation of scattered and unconnected facts. Such observations taking their rise at first from feeling and experience, were found on examination to be so consonant to reason, and to the principles of human nature, as to pass into established rules, and to be conveniently applied for judging of the excellency of any performance. This is the most natural account of the origin of criticism.

A masterly genius, it is true, will, of himself, untaught, compose in such a manner as shall be agreeable to the most material rules of criticism; for as these rules are founded in nature, nature will often suggest them in practice. Homer, it is more than probable, was acquainted with no systems of the art of poetry. Guided by genius

alone, he composed in verse a regular story, which all posterity has admired. But this is no argument against the usefulness of criticism as an art. For as no human genius is perfect, there is no writer but may receive assistance from critical observations upon the beauties and faults of those who have gone before him. No observations or rules can indeed supply the defect of genius, or inspire it where it is wanting. But they may often direct it into its proper channel; they may correct its extravagancies, and point out to it the most just and proper imitation of nature. Critical rules are designed chiefly to shew the faults that ought to be avoided. To nature we must be indebted for the production of eminent beauties.

From what has been said, we are enabled to form a judgment concerning those complaints which it has long been fashionable for petty authors to make against critics and criticism. Critics have been represented as the great abridgers of the native liberty of genius; as the imposers of unnatural shackles and bonds upon writers, from whose cruel persecution they must fly to the public, and implore its protection. Such supplicatory prefaces are not calculated to give very favourable ideas of the genius of the author. For every good writer will be pleased to have his work examined by the principles of sound understanding and true taste. The declamations against criticism commonly proceed upon this supposition, that critics



✓ are such as judge by rule, not by feeling ; which is so far from being true, that they who judge after this manner, are pedants, not critics. For all the rules of genuine criticism, I have shewn to be ultimately founded on feeling ; and taste and feeling are necessary to guide us in the application of these rules to every particular instance. As there is nothing in which all sorts of persons more readily affect to be judges than in works of taste, there is no doubt that the number of incompetent critics will always be great. But this affords no more foundation for a general invective against criticism, than the number of bad philosophers or reasoners affords against reason and philosophy.

An objection more plausible may be formed against criticism, from the applause that some performances have received from the public, which, when accurately considered, are found to contradict the rules established by criticism. Now, according to the principles laid down in the last Lecture, the public is the supreme judge to whom the last appeal must be made in every work of taste ; as the standard of taste is founded on the ✓ ✓ sentiments that are natural and common to all men. But with respect to this, we are to observe that the sense of the public is often too hastily judged of. The genuine public taste does not always appear in the first applause given upon the publication of any new work. There are both a great vulgar and a small, apt to be caught and dazzled

by very superficial beauties, the admiration of which in a little time passes away ; and sometimes a writer may acquire great temporary reputation merely by his compliance with the passions or prejudices, with the party-spirit or superstitious notions that may chance to rule for a time almost a whole nation. In such cases, though the public may seem to praise, true criticism may with reason condemn ; and it will in progress of time gain the ascendant : for the judgment of true criticism, and the voice of the public, when once become unprejudiced and dispassionate, will ever coincide at last.

Instances I admit there are of some works, that contain gross transgressions of the laws of criticism, acquiring, nevertheless, a general, and even a lasting admiration. Such are the plays of Shakespeare, which, considered as dramatic poems, are irregular in the highest degree. But then we are to remark, that they have gained the public admiration, not by their being irregular, not by their transgressions of the rules of art, but in spite of such transgressions. They possess other beauties, which are conformable to just rules ; and the force of these beauties has been so great as to overpower all censure, and to give the public a degree of satisfaction superior to the disgust arising from their blemishes. Shakespeare pleases, not by his bringing the transactions of many years into one play : not by his grotesque mixtures of tragedy and co-

medy in one piece, nor by the strained thoughts, and affected witticisms, which he sometimes employs. These we consider as blemishes, and impute them to the grossness of the age in which he lived. But he pleases by his animated and masterly representations of characters, by the liveliness of his descriptions, the force of his sentiments, and his possessing, beyond all writers, the natural language of passion ; beauties which true criticism no less teaches us to place in the highest rank, than nature teaches us to feel.

I proceed next to explain the meaning of another term, which there will be frequent occasion to employ in these lectures ; that is, *Genius*.

Taste and genius are two words frequently joined together ; and therefore, by inaccurate thinkers, confounded. They signify, however, two quite different things. The difference between them can be clearly pointed out ; and it is of importance to remember it. Taste consists in the power of judging ; genius, in the power of executing. One may have a considerable degree of taste in poetry, eloquence, or any of the fine arts, who has little or hardly any genius for composition or execution in any of these arts ; but genius cannot be found without including taste also. Genius, therefore, deserves to be considered as a higher power of the mind than taste. Genius always imports something inventive or crea-

tive; which does not rest in mere sensibility to beauty where it is perceived, but which can, moreover, produce new beauties, and exhibit them in such a manner as strongly to impress the minds of others. Refined taste forms a good critic; but genius is farther necessary to form the poet, or the orator.

It is proper also to observe, that genius is a word which, in common acceptation, extends much farther than to the objects of taste. It is used to signify that talent or aptitude which we receive from nature, for excelling in any one thing whatever. Thus we speak of a genius for mathematics, as well as a genius for poetry; of a genius for war, for politics, or for any mechanical employment.

This talent or aptitude for excelling in some one particular, is, I have said, what we receive from nature. By art and study, no doubt, it may be greatly improved; but by them alone it cannot be acquired. As genius is a higher faculty than taste, it is ever, according to the usual frugality of nature, more limited in the sphere of its operations. It is not uncommon to meet with persons who have an excellent taste in several of the polite arts, such as music, poetry, painting, and eloquence, all together: but, to find one who is an excellent performer in all these arts, is much more rare; or rather, indeed, such an one is not to be

looked for. A sort of universal genius, or one who is equally and indifferently turned towards several different professions and arts, is not likely to excel in any. Although there may be some few exceptions, yet in general it holds, that when the bent of the mind is wholly directed towards some one object, exclusive in a manner, of others, there is the fairest prospect of eminence in that, whatever it be. The rays must converge to a point, ✓ in order to glow intensely. This remark I here choose to make, on account of its great importance to young people; in leading them to examine with care, and to pursue with ardour, the current and pointing of nature towards those exertions of genius in which they are most likely to excel.

A genius for any of the fine arts, as I before observed, always supposes taste; and it is clear, ✓ that the improvement of taste will serve both to forward and to correct the operations of genius. In proportion as the taste of a poet, or orator, becomes more refined with respect to the beauties of composition, it will certainly assist him to produce the more finished beauties in his work. Genius, however, in a poet, or orator, may sometimes exist in a higher degree than taste; that is, genius may be bold and strong, when taste is neither very delicate, nor very correct. This is often the case in the infancy of arts; a period when genius frequently exerts itself with great vigour, and executes



with much warmth ; while taste, which requires experience, and improves by slower degrees, hath not yet attained to its full growth. Homer and Shakespeare are proofs of what I now assert ; in whose admirable writings are found instances of rudeness and indelicacy, which the more refined taste of later writers, who had far inferior genius to them, would have taught them to avoid. As all human perfection is limited, this may very probably be the law of our nature, that it is not given to one man to execute with vigour and fire, and, at the same time, to attend to all the lesser and more refined graces that belong to the exact perfection of his work : while, on the other hand, a thorough taste for those inferior graces is, for the most part, accompanied with a diminution of sublimity and force.

Having thus explained the nature of taste, the nature and importance of criticism, and the distinction between taste and genius ; I am now to consider the sources of the pleasures of taste. Here opens a very extensive field ; no less than all the pleasures of the imagination, as they are commonly called, whether afforded us by natural objects, or by the imitations and descriptions of them. But it is not necessary to the purpose of my Lectures that all these should be examined fully ; the pleasure which we receive from discourse, or writing, being the main object of them. All that I propose is, to give some openings into the plea-

sures of taste in general ; and to insist more particularly upon sublimity and beauty.

We are far from having yet attained to any system concerning this subject. Mr Addison was the first who attempted a regular inquiry, in his Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination, published in the sixth volume of the Spectator. He has reduced these pleasures under three heads ; beauty, grandeur, and novelty. His speculations on this subject, if not exceedingly profound, are, however, very beautiful and entertaining ; and he has the merit of having opened a track, which was before unbeaten. The advances made since his time in this curious part of philosophical criticism, are not very considerable ; though some ingenious writers have pursued the subject. This is owing, doubtless, to that thinness and subtilty which are found to be properties of all the feelings of taste. They are engaging objects ; but when we would lay firm hold of them, and subject them to a regular discussion, they are always ready to elude our grasp. It is difficult to make a full enumeration of the several objects that give pleasure to taste ; it is more difficult to define all those which have been discovered, and to reduce them under proper classes ; and when we would go farther, and investigate the efficient causes of the pleasure which we receive from such objects, here, above all, we find ourselves at a loss. For instance, we all learn by experience, that certain

figures of bodies appear to us more beautiful than others. On inquiring farther, we find that the regularity of some figures, and the graceful variety of others, are the foundation of the beauty which we discern in them; but when we attempt to go a step beyond this, and inquire what is the cause of regularity and variety producing in our minds the sensation of beauty, any reason we can assign is extremely imperfect. These first principles of internal sensation nature seems to have covered with an impenetrable veil.

It is some comfort, however, that although the efficient cause be obscure, the final cause of those sensations lies in many cases more open: and, in entering on this subject, we cannot avoid taking notice of the strong impression which the powers of taste and imagination are calculated to give us of the benignity of our Creator. By endowing us with such powers, he hath widely enlarged the sphere of the pleasures of human life; and those, too, of a kind the most pure and innocent. The necessary purposes of life might have been abundantly answered, though our senses of seeing and hearing had only served to extinguish external objects, without conveying to us any of those refined and delicate sensations of beauty and grandeur, with which we are now so much delighted. This additional embellishment and glory, which, for promoting our entertainment, the Author of Nature hath poured forth upon his works, is one

striking testimony, among many others, of benevolence and goodness. This thought, which Mr Addison first started, Dr Akenside, in his poem on the Pleasures of the Imagination, has happily pursued.

—— Not content

With every food of life to nourish man,  
By kind illusions of the wondering sense,  
Thou mak'st all nature, beauty to his eye,  
Or music to his ear.——

I shall begin with considering the pleasure which arises from sublimity or grandeur, of which I propose to treat at some length; both, as this has a character more precise and distinctly marked than any other of the pleasures of the imagination, and as it coincides more directly with our main subject. For the greater distinctness, I shall, first, treat of the grandeur or sublimity of external objects themselves, which will employ the rest of this Lecture; and, afterwards, of the description of such objects, or of what is called the sublime in writing, which shall be the subject of a following Lecture. I distinguish these two things from one another, the grandeur of the objects themselves when they are presented to the eye, and the description of that grandeur in discourse or writing; though most critics, inaccurately, I think, blend them together; and I consider grandeur and sublimity as terms synonymous, or nearly so. If there be any distinction between them, it arises

from sublimity's expressing grandeur in its highest degree \*.

It is not easy to describe, in words, the precise impression which great and sublime objects make upon us when we behold them, but every one has a conception of it. It produces a sort of internal elevation and expansion; it raises the mind much above its ordinary state; and fills it with a degree of wonder and astonishment, which it cannot well express. The emotion is certainly delightful; but it is altogether of the serious kind; a degree of awfulness and solemnity, even approaching to severity, commonly attends it when at its height; very distinguishable from the more gay and brisk emotion raised by beautiful objects.

The simple form of external grandeur appears in the vast and boundless prospects presented to us by nature; such as wide extended plains, to which the eye can see no limits; the firmament of Heaven, or the boundless expanse of the ocean. All vastness produces the impression of sublimity. It is to be remarked, however, that space, extended in length, makes not so strong an impression as height or depth. Though a boundless plain be a grand object, yet a high mountain, to which we

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\* See a Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Dr Gerard on Taste, Section II. Elements of Criticism, Chap. IV.



look up, or an awful precipice or tower whence we look down on the objects which lie below, is still more so. The excessive grandeur of the firmament arises from its height, joined to its boundless extent; and that of the ocean, not from its extent alone, but from the perpetual motion and irresistible force of that mass of waters. Wherever space is concerned, it is clear, that amplitude or greatness of extent, in one dimension or other, is necessary to grandeur. Remove all bounds from any object, and you presently render it sublime. Hence infinite space, endless numbers, and eternal duration, fill the mind with great ideas.

From this some have imagined, that vastness or amplitude of extent, is the foundation of all sublimity. But I cannot be of this opinion, because many objects appear sublime which have no relation to space at all. Such, for instance, is great loudness of sound. The burst of thunder or of cannon, the roaring of winds, the shouting of multitudes, the sound of vast cataracts of water, are all incontestibly grand objects. "I heard the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and of mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah." In general we may observe, that great power and force exerted, always raise sublime ideas; and perhaps the most copious source of these is derived from this quarter. Hence the grandeur of earthquakes and burning mountains; of great conflagrations; of the stormy ocean, and over-

flowing waters; of tempests of wind; of thunder and lightning; and of all the uncommon violence of the elements. Nothing is more sublime than mighty power and strength. A stream that runs within its banks is a beautiful object; but when it rushes down with the impetuosity and noise of a torrent, it presently becomes a sublime one. From lions and other animals of strength, are drawn sublime comparisons in poets. A race-horse is looked upon with pleasure; but it is the war-horse, "whose neck is clothed with thunder," that carries grandeur in its idea. The engagement of two great armies, as it is the highest exertion of human might, combines a variety of sources of the sublime; and has accordingly been always considered as one of the most striking and magnificent spectacles that can either be presented to the eye, or exhibited to the imagination in description.

For the farther illustration of this subject, it is proper to remark, that all ideas of the solemn and awful kind, and even bordering on the terrible, tend greatly to assist the sublime; such as darkness, solitude, and silence. What are the scenes of nature that elevate the mind in the highest degree, and produce the sublime sensation? Not the gay landscape, the flowery field, or the flourishing city; but the hoary mountain, and the solitary lake; the aged forest, and the torrent falling over the rock. Hence, too, night scenes are commonly the most sublime. The firmament, when filled with stars, scattered in such vast numbers,

and with such magnificent profusion, strikes the imagination with a more awful grandeur, than when we view it enlightened with all the splendour of the sun. The deep sound of a great bell, or the striking of a great clock, are at any time grand ; but when heard amid the silence and stillness of the night, they become doubly so. Darkness is very commonly applied for adding sublimity to all our ideas of the Deity. “ He maketh darkness his pavilion ; he dwelleth in the thick cloud.” So Milton :

————— How oft, amidst  
Thick clouds and dark, does Heaven’s all ruling sire  
Choose to reside, his glory unobscur’d,  
And, with the majesty of darkness, round  
Circles his throne—————

BOOK II. 263.

Observe, with how much art Virgil has introduced all those ideas of silence, vacuity, and darkness, when he is going to introduce his hero to the infernal regions, and to disclose the secrets of the great deep.

*Dii quibus imperium est animarum, umbræque silentes,  
Et Chaos, et Phlegethon, loca nocte silentia latè,  
Sit mihi fas audita loqui ; sit numine vestro  
Pandere res altâ terrâ, et caligine mersas.  
Ibant obscuri, sola sub nocte, per umbram,  
Perque domos Ditis vacuos, et inania regna ;  
Quale per incertam lunam, sub luce maligna  
Est iter in silvis——\*.*

† Ye subterranean gods, whose awful sway  
The gliding ghosts and silent shades obey ;

These passages I quote at present, not so much as instances of sublime writing, though in themselves they truly are so, as to shew, by the effect of them, that the objects which they present to us, belong to the class of sublime ones.

Obscurity, we are farther to remark, is not unfavourable to the sublime. Though it render the object indistinct, the impression, however, may be great; for, as an ingenious author has well observed, it is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination; and the imagination may be strongly affected, and, in fact, often is so, by objects of which we have no clear conception. Thus we see, that almost all the descriptions given us of the appearances of supernatural beings, carry some sublimity, though the conceptions which they afford us be confused and indistinct. Their sublimity arises from the ideas, which they always convey, of superior power and might, joined with an awful obscurity. We

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O Chaos, hear ! and Phlegethon profound !  
Whose solemn empire stretches wide around !  
Give me, ye great tremendous powers ! to tell  
Of scenes and wonders in the depths of hell ;  
Give me your mighty secrets to display,  
From those black realms of darkness to the day.      PITT.

Obscure they went ; through dreary shades, that led  
Along the waste dominions of the dead ;  
As wander travellers in woods by night,  
By the moon's doubtful and malignant light.      DRYDEN.

may see this fully exemplified in the following noble passage of the book of Job : “ In thoughts  
 “ from the visions of the night, when deep sleep  
 “ falleth upon men, fear came upon me, and  
 “ trembling, which made all my bones to shake.  
 “ Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair  
 “ of my flesh stood up; it stood still; but I could  
 “ not discern the form thereof; an image was be-  
 “ fore mine eyes; there was silence; and I heard  
 “ a voice saying, Shall mortal man be more just  
 “ than God? \*” Job iv. 15. No ideas, it is plain,  
 are so sublime as those taken from the Supreme  
 Being; the most unknown, but the greatest of all  
 objects; the infinity of whose nature, and the  
 eternity of whose duration, joined with the omni-  
 potence of his power, though they surpass our  
 conceptions, yet exalt them to the highest. In  
 general, all objects that are greatly raised above  
 us, or far removed from us, either in space or in  
 time, are apt to strike us as great. Our viewing

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\* The picture which Lucretius has drawn of the dominion of superstition over mankind, representing it as a portentous spectre shewing its head from the clouds, and dismaying the whole human race with its countenance; together with the magnanimity of Epicurus in raising himself up against it, carries all the grandeur of a sublime, obscure, and awful image:

Humana ante oculos fœde cum vita jaceret  
 In terris, oppressa gravi sub religione,  
 Quæ caput cœli regionibus ostendebat,  
 Horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans,  
 Primum Graius homo mortales tollere contra  
 Est oculos ausus.—

LIB. I.



them as through the mist of distance or antiquity, is favourable to the impressions of their sublimity.

As obscurity, so disorder too, is very compatible with grandeur; nay frequently heightens it. Few things that are strictly regular and methodical appear sublime. We see the limits on every side; we feel ourselves confined; there is no room for the mind's exerting any great effort. Exact proportion of parts, though it enters often into the beautiful, is much disregarded in the sublime. A great mass of rocks, thrown together by the hand of nature with wildness and confusion, strike the mind with more grandeur than if they had been adjusted to one another with the most accurate symmetry.

In the feeble attempts which human art can make towards producing grand objects (feeble, I mean in comparison with the powers of nature), greatness of dimensions always constitutes a principal part. No pile of building can convey any idea of sublimity, unless it be ample and lofty. There is too in architecture what is called greatness of manner; which seems chiefly to arise from presenting the object to us in one full point of view; so that it shall make its impression whole, entire, and undivided, upon the mind. A Gothic cathedral raises ideas of grandeur in our minds, by its size, its height, its awful obscurity, its strength, its antiquity, and its durability.

There still remains to be mentioned one class of sublime objects, which may be called the moral, or sentimental sublime; arising from certain exertions of the human mind; from certain affections, and actions, of our fellow-creatures. These will be found to be all, or chiefly, of that class, which comes under the name of magnanimity, or heroism; and they produce an effect extremely similar to what is produced by the view of grand objects in nature; filling the mind with admiration, and elevating it above itself. A noted instance of this, quoted by all the French critics, is the celebrated *Qu'il mourut* of Corneille, in the tragedy of Horace. In the famous combat betwixt the Horatii and the Curiatii, the old Horatius, being informed that two of his sons are slain, and that the third had betaken himself to flight; at first will not believe the report; but being thoroughly assured of the fact, is fired with all the sentiments of high honour and indignation at this supposed unworthy behaviour of his surviving son. He is reminded, that his son stood alone against three, and asked what he wished him to have done?—"To have died,"—he answers. In the same manner Porus, taken prisoner by Alexander, after a gallant defence, and asked how he wished to be treated? answering, "like a king;" and Cæsar chiding the pilot who was afraid to set out with him in a storm. "*Quid times? Cæsarem vehis;*" are good instances of this sentimental sublime. Wherever, in some critical and high situation, we

behold a man uncommonly intrepid, and resting upon himself; superior to passion and to fear; animated by some great principle to the contempt of popular opinion, of selfish interest, of dangers, or of death; there we are struck with a sense of the sublime\*.

High virtue is the most natural and fertile source of this moral sublimity. However, on some occasions, where virtue either has no place, or is but imperfectly displayed, yet if extraordinary vigour and force of mind be discovered, we are not insensible to a degree of grandeur in the character; and from the splendid conqueror, or

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\* The sublime, in natural and moral objects, is brought before us in one view, and compared together, in the following beautiful passage of Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*:

Look then abroad through nature; to the range  
Of planets, suns, and adamantine spheres,  
Wheeling, unshaken, through the void immense;  
And speak, O man! does this capacious scene,  
With half that kindling majesty, dilate  
Thy strong conception, as when Brutus rose  
Refulgent, from the stroke of Cæsar's fate,  
Amid the crowd of patriots; and his arm  
Aloft extending, like eternal Jove,  
When guilt brings down the thunder, call'd aloud  
On Tully's name, and shook his crimson steel,  
And bade the father of his country hail!  
For, lo! the tyrant prostrate on the dust;  
And Rome again is free.—

the daring conspirator, whom we are far from approving, we cannot withhold our admiration \*.

I have now enumerated a variety of instances, both in inanimate objects and in human life, where the sublime appears. In all these instances the emotion raised in us is of the same kind, although the objects that produce the emotion be of widely different kinds. A question next arises, whether we are able to discover some one fundamental quality in which all these different objects agree, and which is the cause of their producing an emotion of the same nature in our minds? Various

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\* Silius Italicus studied to give an august idea of Hannibal, by representing him as surrounded with all his victories, in the place of guards. One who had formed a design of assassinating him in the midst of a feast, is thus addressed :

Fallit te, mensas inter quod credis intermem ;  
 Tot bellis quæsitâ viro, tot cædibus, armat  
 Majestas æterna ducem. Si admoveris ora  
 Cannas, et Trebiam ante oculos, Trasymenaque busta  
 Et Pauli stare ingentem miraberis umbram.

A thought somewhat of the same nature occurs in a French author : “ Il se cache ; mais sa reputation le decouvre : Il marche  
 “ sans suite et sans equipage ; mais chacun, dans son esprit, le  
 “ met sur un char de triomphe. On compte, en le voiant, les  
 “ ennemis qu’il a vaincus, non pas les serviteurs qui le suivent.  
 “ Teut seul qu’il est, on se figure, autour de lui, ses vertus et ses  
 “ victoires, que l’accompagnent. Moins il est superbe, plus il  
 “ devient venerable.” *Oraison funebre de M. de Turenne, par M. Flechier.*—Both these passages are splendid, rather than sublime. In the first there is a want of justness in the thought ; in the second, of simplicity in the expression.

hypotheses have been formed concerning this; but, as far as appears to me, hitherto unsatisfactory. Some have imagined that amplitude or great extent, joined with simplicity, is either immediately, or remotely, the fundamental quality of whatever is sublime; but we have seen that amplitude is confined to one species of sublime objects; and cannot, without violent straining, be applied to them all. The author of "A Philosophical Inquiry into the origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," to whom we are indebted for several ingenious and original thoughts upon this subject, proposes a formal theory upon this foundation; that terror is the source of the sublime, and that no objects have this character, but such as produce impressions of pain and danger. It is indeed true, that many terrible objects are highly sublime; and that grandeur does not refuse an alliance with the idea of danger. But though this is very properly illustrated by the author (many of whose sentiments on that head I have adopted), yet he seems to stretch his theory too far, when he represents the sublime as consisting wholly in modes of danger, or of pain. For the proper sensation of sublimity appears to be distinguishable from the sensation of either of these; and, on several occasions, to be entirely separated from them. In many grand objects, there is no coincidence with terror at all; as in the magnificent prospect of wide extended plains, and of the starry firmament; or in the moral disposi-



tions and sentiments, which we view with high admiration ; and in many painful and terrible objects also, it is clear, there is no sort of grandeur. The amputation of a limb, or the bite of a snake, are exceedingly terrible ; but are destitute of all claim whatever to sublimity. I am inclined to think, that mighty force or power, whether accompanied with terror or not, whether employed in protecting or in alarming us, has a better title than any thing that has yet been mentioned, to be the fundamental quality of the sublime ; as, after the review which we have taken, there does not occur to me any sublime object, into the idea of which, power, strength, and force, either enter, not directly, or are not, at least, intimately associated with the idea, by leading our thoughts to some astonishing power, as concerned in the production of the object. However, I do not insist upon this as sufficient to found a general theory ; it is enough to have given this view of the nature and different kinds of sublime objects ; by which I hope to have laid a proper foundation for discussing, with greater accuracy, the sublime in writing and composition.

## LECTURE IV.

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### THE SUBLIME IN WRITING.

**H**AVING treated of grandeur or sublimity in external objects, the way seems now to be cleared, for treating, with more advantage, of the description of such objects; or, of what is called the sublime in writing. Though I may appear to enter early on the consideration of this subject; yet as the sublime is a species of writing which depends less than any other on the artificial embellishments of rhetoric, it may be examined with as much propriety here, as in any subsequent part of the Lectures.

Many critical terms have unfortunately been employed, in a sense too loose and vague, none more so than that of the sublime. Every one is acquainted with the character of Cæsar's Commentaries, and of the style in which they are written; a style remarkably pure, simple, and elegant;

but the most remote from the sublime, of any of the classical authors. Yet this author has a German critic, Johannes Gulielmus Bergerus, who wrote no longer ago than the year 1720, pitched upon as the perfect model of the sublime, and has composed a quarto volume, entitled *De naturali Pulchritudine Orationis*; the express intention of which is to shew, that Cæsar's Commentaries contain the most complete exemplification of all Longinus's rules relating to sublime writing. This I mention as a strong proof of the confused ideas which have prevailed concerning this subject. The true sense of sublime writing, undoubtedly, is such a description of objects, or exhibition of sentiments, which are in themselves of a sublime nature, as shall give us strong impressions of them. But there is another very indefinite, and therefore very improper, sense, which has been too often put upon it; when it is applied to signify any remarkable and distinguishing excellency of composition, whether it raise in us the ideas of grandeur, or those of gentleness; elegance, or any other sort of beauty. In this sense Cæsar's Commentaries may, indeed, be termed sublime, and so may many Sonnets, Pastorals, and Love Elegies, as well as Homer's Iliad. But this evidently confounds the use of words; and marks no one species, or character, of composition whatever.

I am sorry to be obliged to observe, that the sublime is too often used in this last and improper

sense, by the celebrated critic Longinus, in his treatise on this subject. He sets out, indeed, with describing it in its just and proper meaning; as something that elevates the mind above itself, and fills it with high conceptions, and a noble pride. But from this view of it he frequently departs; and substitutes in the place of it, whatever, in any strain of composition, pleases highly. Thus, many of the passages which he produces as instances of the sublime, are merely elegant, without having the most distant relation to proper sublimity; witness Sappho's famous ode, on which he descants at considerable length. He points out five sources of the sublime. The first is, boldness or grandeur in the thoughts; the second is, the pathetic; the third, the proper application of figures; the fourth, the use of tropes and beautiful expressions; the fifth, musical structure and arrangement of words. This is the plan of one who was writing a treatise of rhetoric, or of the beauties of writing in general; not of the sublime in particular. For of these five heads, only the two first have any peculiar relation to the sublime; boldness and grandeur in the thoughts, and, in some instances, the pathetic, or strong exertions of passion; the other three, tropes, figures, and musical arrangements, have no more relation to the sublime, than to other kinds of good writing; perhaps less to the sublime than to any other species whatever; because it requires less the assistance of ornament. From this it ap-



pears, that clear and precise ideas on this head are not to be expected from that writer. I would not, however, be understood, as if I meant, by this censure, to represent his treatise as of small value. I know no critic, ancient or modern, that discovers a more lively relish of the beauties of fine writing, than Longinus; and he has also the merit of being himself an excellent, and, in several passages, a truly sublime writer. But, as his work has been generally considered as a standard on this subject, it was incumbent on me to give my opinion concerning the benefit to be derived from it. It deserves to be consulted, not so much for distinct instruction concerning the sublime, as for excellent general ideas concerning beauty in writing.

I return now to the proper and natural idea of the sublime in composition. The foundation of it must always be laid in the nature of the object described. Unless it be such an object as, if presented to our eyes, if exhibited to us in reality, would raise ideas of that elevating, that awful, and magnificent kind, which we call sublime; the description, however finely drawn, is not entitled to come under this class. This excludes all objects that are merely beautiful, gay, or elegant. In the next place, the object must not only in itself be sublime, but it must be set before us in such a light as is most proper to give us a clear and full impression of it; it must be described with strength, with conciseness, and simplicity. This



depends, principally, upon the lively impression which the poet, or orator, has of the object which he exhibits; and upon his being deeply affected, and warmed, by the sublime idea which he would convey. If his own feeling be languid, he can never inspire us with any strong emotion. Instances, which are extremely necessary on this subject, will clearly shew the importance of all the requisites which I have just now mentioned.

It is, generally speaking, among the most ancient authors, that we are to look for the most striking instances of the sublime. I am inclined to think, that the early ages of the world, and the rude unimproved state of society, are peculiarly favourable to the strong emotions of sublimity. The genius of men is then much turned to admiration and astonishment. Meeting with many objects, to them new and strange, their imagination is kept glowing, and their passions are often raised to the utmost. They think and express themselves boldly, and without restraint. In the progress of society, the genius and manners of men undergo a change more favourable to accuracy, than to strength or sublimity.

Of all writings, ancient or modern, the sacred scriptures afford us the highest instances of the sublime. The descriptions of the Deity, in them, are wonderfully noble; both from the grandeur of the object, and the manner of representing it. What an assemblage, for instance, of awful and

sublime ideas is presented to us, in that passage of the xviii<sup>th</sup> Psalm, where an appearance of the Almighty is described? “ In my distress I called  
“ upon the Lord ; he heard my voice out of his  
“ temple, and my cry came before him. Then  
“ the earth shook and trembled ; the foundations  
“ also of the hills were moved ; because he was  
“ wroth. He bowed the heavens and came down,  
“ and darkness was under his feet ; and he did  
“ ride upon a cherub, and did fly ; yea, he did fly  
“ upon the wings of the wind. He made dark-  
“ ness his secret place ; his pavilion round about  
“ him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the  
“ sky.” Here, agreeably to the principles established in the last Lecture, we see with what propriety and success the circumstances of darkness and terror are applied for heightening the sublime. So, also, the prophet Habakkuk, in a similar passage : “ He stood, and measured the earth ; he  
“ beheld, and drove asunder the nations. The  
“ everlasting mountains were scattered ; the perpetual hills did bow ; his ways are everlasting.  
“ The mountains saw thee ; and they trembled.  
“ The overflowing of the water passed by. The  
“ deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on  
“ high.”

The noted instance given by Longinus, from Moses, “ God said, let there be light ; and there  
“ was light ;” is not liable to the censure which I passed on some of his instances, of being foreign to the subject. It belongs to the true sublime ;

and the sublimity of it arises from the strong conception it gives of an exertion of power, producing its effect with the utmost speed and facility. A thought of the same kind is magnificently amplified in the following passage of Isaiah (chap. xliv. 24. 27, 28.) " Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb: I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself—that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers; that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." There is a passage in the Psalms, which deserves to be mentioned under this head: " God," says the Psalmist, " stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumults of the people." The joining together two such grand objects, as the raging of the waters, and the tumults of the people, between which there is so much resemblance as to form a very natural association in the fancy, and the representing them both as subject, at one moment, to the command of God, produces a noble effect.

Homer is a poet, who, in all ages, and by all critics, has been greatly admired for sublimity; and he owes much of his grandeur to that native and unaffected simplicity which characterises his

manner. His descriptions of hosts engaging; the animation, the fire, and rapidity, which he throws into his battles, present to every reader of the *Iliad*, frequent instances of sublime writing. His introduction of the gods tends often to heighten, in a high degree, the majesty of his warlike scenes. Hence Longinus bestows such high and just commendations on that passage, in the xvth book of the *Iliad*, where Neptune, when preparing to issue forth into the engagement, is described as shaking the mountains with his steps, and driving his chariot along the ocean. Minerva, arming herself for fight in the vth book; and Apollo, in the xvth, leading on the Trojans, and flashing terror with his *Ægis* on the face of the Greeks; are similar instances of great sublimity added to the description of battles, by the appearances of those celestial beings. In the xxth book, where all the gods take part in the engagement, according as they severally favour either the Grecians or the Trojans, the poet's genius is signally displayed, and the description rises into the most awful magnificence. All nature is represented as in commotion. Jupiter thunders in the heavens; Neptune strikes the earth with his trident; the ships, the city, and the mountains shake; the earth trembles to its centre; Pluto starts from his throne, in dread, lest the secrets of the infernal region should be laid open to the view of mortals. The passage is worthy of being inserted.



Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ μετ' ὅμιλον Ὀλύμπιοι ἤλυθον ἀνδρῶν,  
 ὦρτο δ' Ἐρις κρατερῇ, λαοσσόος· αὖτε δ' Ἀθήνη,—  
 Αὖτε δ' Ἀρης ἐτέρωθεν, ἐριμῇ λαίλαπι ἴσος,—  
 ὧς τὰς ἀμφοτέρωσ μάκαρες θεοὶ ὀτρύνοντες,  
 Σύμβαλον, ἐν δ' αὐτοῖς ἔριδα ῥήγνυντο βαρεῖαν·  
 Διυὸν δ' ἐβρόντησι πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε  
 ὕψεσιν αὐτὰρ ἔνευθε Ποσειδάων ἐτίναξε·  
 Γαῖαν ἀπειρεσίην, ὄρεων τ' αἰπυνὰ κάρηνα.  
 Πάντι δ' ἐσίστοιτο πόδες πολυπιδάκρυ Ἰδης,  
 Καὶ κορυφαί, Τρώων τε πόλεις, καὶ νῆες Ἀχαιῶν.  
 Εἰδοῖσιν δ' ὑπὲρθε ἄναξ ἑέρων, Ἀἰδωνεύς,  
 Δείσας δ' ἐκ θρόνου ἄλτο καὶ ἱαχε· μή οἱ ὕπερθε  
 Γαῖαν ἀναρρήξειε Ποσειδάων ἐσσίχθων,  
 Οἰκία δὲ θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισι φανείη  
 Σμερδαλέ, ἐνρώντα, τὰ τε συγέσσι θεοὶ περ·  
 Τοσσοσ ἄρα κτύπος ὦρτο θεῶν ἔριδι ζυυιόντων \*.

Iliad, xx. 47, &c.

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- \* But when the powers descending swell'd the fight,  
 Then tumult rose, fierce rage, and pale affright ;—  
 Now through the trembling shores Minerva calls,  
 And now she thunders from the Grecian walls.  
 Mars hov'ring o'er his Troy, his terror shrouds  
 In gloomy tempests, and a night of clouds ;  
 Now through each Trojan heart he fury pours,  
 With voice divine, from Ilion's topmost towers.—  
 Above, the Sire of gods his thunder rolls,  
 And peals on peals redoubled rend the poles.  
 Beneath, stern Neptune shakes the solid ground,  
 The forests wave, the mountains nod around ;  
 Through all her summits tremble Ida's woods,  
 And from their sources boil her hundred floods,  
 Troy's turrets totter on the rocking plain,  
 And the toss'd navies beat the heaving main.



The works of Ossian (as I have elsewhere shewn) abound with examples of the sublime. The subjects of which that author treats, and the manner in which he writes, are particularly favourable to it. He possesses all the plain and venerable manner of the ancient times. He deals in no superfluous or gaudy ornaments ; but throws forth his images with a rapid conciseness, which enables them to strike the mind with the greatest force. Among poets of more polished times we are to look for the graces of correct writing, for just proportion of parts, and skilfully conducted narration. In the midst of smiling scenery and pleasurable themes, the gay and the beautiful will appear, undoubtedly, to more advantage. But amidst the rude scenes of nature and of society, such as Ossian describes ; amidst rocks, and torrents, and whirlwinds, and battles, dwells the sublime ; and naturally associates itself with that grave and solemn spirit which distinguishes the author of Fingal. “ As autumn’s dark storms pour from  
“ two echoing hills, so toward each other ap-  
“ proached the heroes. As two dark streams from

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Deep in the dismal region of the dead,  
Th’ infernal monarch rear’d his horrid head,  
Leapt from his throne, lest Neptune’s arms should lay  
His dark dominions open to the day ;  
And pour in light on Pluto’s drear abodes,  
Abhorr’d by men, and dreadful even to gods,  
Such wars th’ immortals wage ; such horrors rend  
The world’s vast concave, when the gods contend.

POPE.

“ high rocks meet and mix, and roar on the plain :  
“ loud, rough, and dark, in battle, met Lochlin  
“ and Inisfail ; chief mixed his strokes with chief,  
“ and man with man. Steel clanging sounded on  
“ steel. Helmets are cleft on high ; blood bursts,  
“ and smokes around. As the troubled noise of  
“ the ocean when roll the waves on high ; as the  
“ last peal of the thunder of heaven ; such is the  
“ noise of battle. The groan of the people  
“ spread over the hills. It was like the thunder  
“ of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona, and  
“ a thousand ghosts shriek at once on the hollow  
“ wind.” Never were images of more awful sublimity employed to heighten the terror of battle.

I have produced these instances, in order to demonstrate that conciseness and simplicity are essential to sublime writing. Simplicity, I place in opposition to studied and profuse ornament ; and conciseness to superfluous expression. The reason why a defect, either in conciseness or simplicity, is hurtful in a peculiar manner to the sublime, I shall endeavour to explain. The emotion occasioned in the mind by some great or noble object, raises it considerably above its ordinary pitch. A sort of enthusiasm is produced extremely agreeable while it lasts ; but from which the mind is tending every moment to fall down into its ordinary situation. Now, when an author has brought us, or is attempting to bring us, into this state, if he multiplies words unnecessarily, if he

decks the sublime object which he presents to us, round and round, with glittering ornaments ; nay, if he throws in any one decoration that sinks in the least below the capital image, that moment he alters the key ; he relaxes the tension of the mind ; the strength of the feeling is emasculated ; the beautiful may remain, but the sublime is gone. When Julius Cæsar said to the Pilot who was afraid to put to sea with him in a storm, “ Quid times ? Cæsarem vehis ;” we are struck with the daring magnanimity of one relying with such confidence on his cause and his fortune. These few words convey every thing necessary to give us the impression full. Lucan resolved to amplify and adorn the thought. Observe how every time he twists it round, it departs farther from the sublime, till it end at last in tumid declamation.

Sperne minas, inquit, pelagi, ventoque furenti  
 Trade sinus : Italiam, si cælo auctore, recusas,  
 Me, pete. Sola tibi causa hæc est justa timoris  
 Vectorem non nôsse tuum ; quem numina nunquam  
 Destituunt ; de quo male tunc Fortuna meretur,  
 Cum post vota venit. Medias perrumpe procellas  
 Tutela secure meâ. Cœli iste fretique  
 Non puppis nostræ labor est. Hanc Cæsare pressam  
 A fluctu defendet onus ; nam proderit undis  
 Ista ratis :—Quid tanta strage paretur  
 Ignoras ? quærit pelagi, cœlique tumultu  
 Quod præstet fortuna mihi \*.—PHARS. V. 578.

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\* But Cæsar still superior to distress  
 Fearless, and confident of sure success,  
 Thus to the pilot loud :—The seas despise,  
 And the vain threat'ning of the noisy skies :

On account of the great importance of simplicity and conciseness, I conceive rhyme, in English verse, to be, if not inconsistent with the sublime, at least very unfavourable to it. The constrained elegance of this kind of verse, and studied smoothness of the sounds, answering regularly to each other at the end of the line, though they be quite consistent with gentle emotions, yet weaken the native force of sublimity; besides, that the superfluous words which the poet is often obliged to introduce, in order to fill up the rhyme, tend farther to enfeeble it. Homer's description of the nod of Jupiter, as shaking the heavens, has been admired in all ages, as highly sublime. Literally translated, it runs thus: "He spoke, and bending

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Though gods deny thee yon Ausonian strand,  
Yet go, I charge you, go, at my command.  
Thy ignorance alone can cause thy fears,  
Thou know'st not what a freight thy vessel bears;  
Thou know'st not I am he to whom 'tis given,  
Never to want the care of watchful heaven.  
Obedient fortune waits my humble thrall,  
And always ready, comes before I call.  
Let winds, and seas, loud wars at freedom wage,  
And waste upon themselves their empty rage;  
A stronger, mightier dæmon is thy friend,  
Thou, and thy bark, on Cæsar's fate depend.  
Thou stand'st amaz'd to view this dreadful scene,  
And wonder'st what the gods and fortune mean;  
But artfully their bounties thus they raise,  
And from my danger arrogate new praise:  
Amidst the fears of death they bid me live,  
And still enhance what they are sure to give.      ROWE.

“ his sable brows, gave the awful nod ; while he  
“ shook the celestial locks of his immortal head,  
“ all Olympus was shaken.” Mr Pope translates  
it thus :

He spoke ; and awful bends his sable brows,  
Shakes his ambrosial curls and gives the nod,  
The stamp of fate, and sanction of a god.  
High heaven with trembling the dread signal took,  
And all Olympus to its centre shook.

The image is spread out, and attempted to be beautified ; but it is, in truth, weakened. The third line—“ The stamp of fate, and sanction of “ a god,” is merely expletive, and introduced for no other reason but to fill up the rhyme ; for it interrupts the description, and clogs the image. For the same reason, out of mere compliance with the rhyme, Jupiter is represented as shaking his locks before he gives the nod ;—“ Shakes his ambrosial curls, and gives the nod,” which is trifling, and without meaning. Whereas, in the original, the hair of his head shaken, is the effect of his nod, and makes a happy picturesque circumstance in the description \*.

The boldness, freedom, and variety of our blank verse, is infinitely more favourable than rhyme, to all kinds of sublime poetry. The fullest proof of this is afforded by Milton ; an author whose

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\* See Webb, on the Beauties of Poetry.



genius led him eminently to the sublime. The whole first and second books of *Paradise Lost* are continued instances of it. Take only for an example, the following noted description of Satan, after his fall, appearing at the head of the infernal hosts :

———He, above the rest,

In shape and gesture proudly eminent,  
 Stood like a tower : his forms had not yet lost  
 All her original brightness, nor appeared  
 Less than archangel ruined ; and the excess  
 Of glory obscured : As when the sun, new risen,  
 Looks through the horizontal misty air,  
 Shorn of his beams ; or, from behind the moon,  
 In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds  
 On half the nations, and with fear of change  
 Perplexes monarchs. Darken'd so, yet shone  
 Above them all, th' Archangel.——

Here concur a variety of sources of the sublime : the principal object eminently great ; a high superior nature, fallen indeed, but erecting itself against distress ; the grandeur of the principal object heightened, by associating it with so noble an idea as that of the sun suffering an eclipse ; this picture shaded with all those images of change and trouble, of darkness and terror, which coincide so finely with the sublime emotion ; and the whole expressed in a style and versification, easy, natural, and simple, but magnificent.

I have spoken of simplicity and conciseness as essential to sublime writing. In my general de-

scription of it, I mentioned strength, as another necessary requisite. The strength of description arises, in a great measure, from a simple conciseness ; but it supposes also something more ; namely, a proper choice of circumstances in the description, so as to exhibit the object in its full and most striking point of view. For every object has several faces, so to speak, by which it may be presented us, according to the circumstances with which we surround it ; and it will appear eminently sublime, or not in proportion as all these circumstances are happily chosen, and of a sublime kind. Here lies the great art of the writer ; and indeed the great difficulty of sublime description. If the description be too general, and divested of circumstances, the object appears in a faint light ; it makes a feeble impression, or no impression at all, on the reader. At the same time, if any trivial or improper circumstances are mingled, the whole is degraded.

A storm or tempest, for instance, is a sublime object in nature. But, to render it sublime in description, it is not enough, either to give us mere general expressions concerning the violence of the tempest, or to describe its common vulgar effects, in overthrowing trees and houses. It must be painted with such circumstances as fill the mind with great and awful ideas. This is very happily done by Virgil, in the following passage :

Ipse Pater, mediâ nimborum in nocte, coruscâ  
 Fulmina molitur dextrâ ; quo maxima motu  
 Terra tremit ; fugera feræ ; et mortalia corda  
 Per gentes humilis stravit pavor : Ille, flagranti  
 Aut Atho, aut Rhodopen, aut alta Ceraunia telo  
 Dejicit \*.

GEORG. I.

Every circumstance in this noble description is the production of an imagination heated and astonished with the grandeur of the object. If there be any defect, it is in the words immediately following those I have quoted. “ Ingeminant Austri, et “ densissimus imber;” where the transition is made too hastily, I am afraid, from the preceding sublime images, to a thick shower, and the blowing of the south wind ; and shews how difficult it frequently is to descend with grace, without seeming to fall.

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\* The father of the gods his glory shrouds,  
 Involved in tempests, and a night of clouds :  
 And from the middle darkness flashing out,  
 By fits he deals his fiery bolts about.  
 Earth feels the motions of her angry god,  
 Her entrails tremble, and her mountains nod,  
 And flying beasts in forests seek abode.  
 Deep horror seizes every human breast ;  
 Their pride is humbled, and their fears confest ;  
 While he, from high, his rolling thunder throws,  
 And fires the mountains with repeated blows ;  
 The rocks are from their old foundations rent ;  
 The winds redouble, and the rains augment.

DRYDEN.

The high importance of the rule which I have been now giving concerning the proper choice of circumstances, when description is meant to be sublime, seems to me not to have been sufficiently attended to. It has, however, such a foundation in nature, as renders the least deflexion from it fatal. When a writer is aiming at the beautiful only, his descriptions may have improprieties in them, and yet be beautiful still. Some trivial or misjudged circumstances can be overlooked by the reader; they make only the difference of more or less; the gay, or pleasing emotion, which he has raised, subsists still. But the case is quite different with the sublime. There, one trifling circumstance, one mean idea, is sufficient to destroy the whole charm. This is owing to the nature of the emotion aimed at by sublime description, which admits of no mediocrity, and cannot subsist in a middle state; but must either highly transport us, or, if unsuccessful in the execution, leave us greatly disgusted, and displeased. We attempt to rise along with the writer; the imagination is awakened, and put upon the stretch; but it requires to be supported; and if, in the midst of its efforts, you desert it unexpectedly, down it comes, with a painful shock. When Milton, in his battle of the angels, describes them as tearing up the mountains, and throwing them at one another; there are, in his description, as Mr Addison has observed, no circumstances but what are properly sublime.

From their foundations loos'ning to and fro,  
 They plucked the seated hills, with all their load,  
 Rocks, waters, woods ; and by the shaggy tops,  
 Uplifting, bore them in their hands.—

Whereas Claudian, in a fragment upon the wars of the giants, has contrived to render this idea of their throwing the mountains, which is in itself so grand, burlesque, and ridiculous ; by this single circumstance, of one of his giants with the mountain Ida upon his shoulders, and a river, which flowed from the mountain, running down along the giant's back, as he held it up in that posture. There is a description too in Virgil, which, I think, is censurable, though more slightly, in this respect. It is that of the burning mountain *Ætna* ; a subject certainly very proper to be worked up by a poet into a sublime description :

—Horificis juxta tonat *Ætna* ruinis.

Interdumque atram prorumpit ad æthera nubem ;

Turbine fumantem piceo, et cadente favillâ ;

Attollitque globos flammæ, et sidera lambit.

Interdum scopulos, avulsaque viscera montis

Erigit eructans, liquefactaque saxe sub auras

Cum gemitu glomerat, fundoque exæstuat imo \*.

*ÆN.* III. 571.

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\* The port capacious, and secure from wind,  
 Is to the foot of thundering *Ætna* join'd :  
 By turns a pitchy cloud she rolls on high,  
 By turns hot embers from her entrails fly,  
 And flakes of mounting flames that lick the sky.



Here, after several magnificent images, the poet concludes with personifying the mountain under this figure: “*Eructans viscera cum gemitu;*” belching up its bowels with a groan; which, by likening the mountain to a sick or drunk person, degrades the majesty of the description. It is to no purpose to tell us, that the poet here alludes to the fable of the giant Enceladus lying under Mount *Ætna*; and that he supposes his motions and tossings to have occasioned the fiery eruptions. He intended the description of a sublime object; and the natural ideas raised by a burning mountain, are infinitely more lofty than the belchings of any giant, how huge soever. The debasing effect of the idea which is here presented, will appear in a stronger light, by seeing what figure it makes in a poem of Sir Richard Blackmore’s, who, through a monstrous perversity of taste, had chosen this for the capital circumstance in his description, and thereby (as Dr Arbuthnot humorously observes, in his *Treatise on the Art of Sinking*) had represented the mountain as in a fit of the cholic.

*Ætna, and all the burning mountains, find  
Their kindled stores with inbred storms of wind.*

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Oft from her bowels massy rocks are thrown,  
And shivered by the force come peace-meal down :  
Oft liquid lakes of burning sulphur flow,  
Fed from the fiery springs that boil below.      DRYDEN.

In this translation of Dryden’s, the debasing circumstance to which I object in the original, is, with propriety, omitted.

Blown up to rage, and roaring out complain,  
As torn with inward gripes and torturing pain ;  
Labouring, they cast their dreadful vomit round,  
And with their melted bowels spread the ground.

Such instances shew how much the sublime depends upon a just selection of circumstances ; and with how great care every circumstance must be avoided, which, by bordering in the least upon the mean, or even upon the gay or the trifling, alters the tone of the emotion.

If it shall now be inquired, what are the proper sources of the sublime ? My answer is, That they are to be looked for everywhere in nature. It is not by hunting after tropes, and figures, and rhetorical assistances, that we can expect to produce it. No : it stands clear, for the most part, of these laboured refinements of art. It must come unsought, if it comes at all ; and be the natural offspring of a strong imagination.

*Est Deus in nobis ; agitante calescimus illo.*

Wherever a great and awful object is presented in nature, or a very magnanimous and exalted affection of the human mind is displayed ; thence, if you can catch the impression strongly, and exhibit it warm and glowing, you may draw the sublime. These are its only proper sources. In judging of any striking beauty in composition, whether it is, or is not, to be referred to this class, we

must attend to the nature of the emotion which it raises; and only, if it be of that elevating, solemn, and awful kind, which distinguishes this feeling, we can pronounce it sublime.

From the account which I have given of the nature of the sublime, it clearly follows, that it is an emotion which can never be long protracted. The mind, by no force of genius, can be kept, for any considerable time, so far raised above its common tone; but will, of course, relax into its ordinary situation. Neither are the abilities of any human writer sufficient to furnish a long continuation of uninterrupted sublime ideas. The utmost we can expect is, that this fire of imagination should sometimes flash upon us like lightning from heaven, and then disappear. In Homer and Milton, this effulgence of genius breaks forth more frequently, and with greater lustre than in most authors. Shakespeare also rises often into the true sublime. But no author whatever is sublime throughout. Some, indeed, there are, who, by a strength and dignity in their conceptions, and a current of high ideas that turns through their whole composition, preserve the reader's mind always in a tone nearly allied to the sublime; for which reason they may, in a limited sense, merit the name of continued sublime writers; and in this class we may justly place Demosthenes and Plato.

As for what is called the sublime style, it is, for the most part, a very bad one; and has no relation whatever to the real sublime. Persons are apt to imagine, that magnificent words, accumulated epithets, and a certain swelling kind of expression, by rising above what is usual or vulgar, contributes to, or even forms, the sublime. Nothing can be more false. In all the instances of sublime writing, which I have given, nothing of this kind appears. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." This is striking and sublime. But put it into what is commonly called the sublime style: The Sovereign Arbiter "of nature, by the potent energy of a single word, commanded the light to exist;" and, as Boileau has well observed, the style indeed is raised, but the thought is fallen. In general, in all good writing, the sublime lies in the thought, not in the words; and when the thought is truly noble, it will, for the most part, clothe itself in a native dignity of language. The sublime, indeed, rejects mean, low, or trivial expressions; but it is equally an enemy to such as are turgid. The main secret of being sublime, is to say great things in few and plain words. It will be found to hold without exception, that the most sublime authors are the simplest in their style; and wherever you find a writer, who affects a more than ordinary pomp and parade of words, and is always endeavouring to magnify his subject by epithets, there you may immediately suspect that,

feeble in sentiment, he is studying to support himself by mere expression.

The same unfavourable judgment we must pass on all that laboured apparatus with which some writers introduce a passage, or description, which they intend shall be sublime ; calling on their readers to attend, invoking their muse, or breaking forth into general, unmeaning exclamations, concerning the greatness, terribleness, or majesty of the object which they are to describe. Mr Addison, in his Campaign, has fallen into an error of this kind, when about to describe the battle of Blenheim.

But O ! my Muse ! what numbers wilt thou find  
To sing the furious troops in battle join'd ?  
Methinks, I hear the drum's tumultuous sound,  
The victor's shouts, and dying groans, confound ; &c.

Introductions of this kind are a forced attempt in a writer to spur up himself, and his reader, when he finds his imagination begin to flag. It is like taking artificial spirits in order to supply the want of such as are natural. By this observation, however, I do not mean to pass a general censure on Mr Addison's Campaign, which, in several places, is far from wanting merit ; and, in particular, the noted comparison of his hero to the angel who rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm, is a truly sublime image.



The faults opposite to the sublime are chiefly two; the frigid and the bombast. The frigid consists in degrading an object, or sentiment, which is sublime in itself, by our mean conception of it; or by our weak, low, and childish description of it. This betrays entire absence, or at least great poverty of genius. Of this, there are abundance of examples, and these commented upon with much humour, in the treatise on the Art of Sinking, in Dean Swift's works; the instances taken chiefly from Sir Richard Blackmore. One of these I had occasion already to give, in relation to Mount *Ætna*, and it were needless to produce any more. The bombast lies in forcing an ordinary or trivial object out of its rank, and endeavouring to raise it into the sublime; or, in attempting to exalt a sublime object beyond all natural and reasonable bounds. Into this error, which is but too common, writers of genius may sometimes fall, by unluckily losing sight of the true point of the sublime. This is also called fustian, or rant. Shakespeare, a great but incorrect genius, is not unexceptionable here. Dryden and Lee, in their tragedies, abound with it.

Thus far of the sublime; of which I have treated fully, because it is so capital an excellency in fine writing, and because clear and precise ideas on this head are, as far as I know, not to be met with in critical writers.

Before I conclude this Lecture, there is one observation which I choose to make at this time ; I shall make it once for all, and hope it will be afterwards remembered. It is with respect to the instances of faults, or rather blemishes and imperfections, which, as I have done in this Lecture, I shall hereafter continue to take, when I can, from writers of reputation. I have not the least intention thereby to disparage their character in the general. I shall have other occasions of doing equal justice to their beauties. But it is no reflection on any human performance, that is not absolutely perfect. The task would be much easier for me, to collect instances of faults from bad writers. But they would draw no attention, when quoted from books which nobody reads. And I conceive that the method which I follow will contribute more to make the best authors be read with pleasure, when one properly distinguishes their beauties from their faults, and is led to imitate and admire only what is worthy of imitation and admiration.

## LECTURE V.

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### BEAUTY, AND OTHER PLEASURES OF TASTE.

As sublimity constitutes a particular character of composition, and forms one of the highest excellencies of eloquence and poetry, it was proper to treat of it at some length. It will not be necessary to discuss so particularly all the other pleasures that arise from taste, as some of them have less relation to our main subject. On beauty only I shall make several observations, both as the subject is curious, and as it tends to improve taste, and to discover the foundation of several of the graces of description and of poetry \*.

Beauty, next to sublimity, affords, beyond

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\* See Hutchinson's Inquiry concerning Beauty and Virtue.—Gerard on Taste, chap. iii.—Inquiry into the Origin of the Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.—Elements of Criticism, chap. iii.—Spectator, vol. vi.—Essay on the Pleasures of Taste.

doubt, the highest pleasure to the imagination. The emotion which it raises, is very distinguishable from that of sublimity. It is of a calmer kind ; more gentle and soothing ; does not elevate the mind so much, but produces an agreeable serenity. Sublimity raises a feeling, too violent, as I shewed, to be lasting ; the pleasure arising from beauty admits of longer continuance. It extends also to a much greater variety of objects than sublimity ; to a variety indeed so great, that the feelings which beautiful objects produce, differ considerably, not in degree only, but also in kind, from one another. Hence, no word in the language is used in a more vague signification than beauty. It is applied to almost every external object that pleases the eye or the ear ; to a great number of the graces of writing ; to many dispositions of the mind ; nay, to several objects of mere abstract science. We talk currently of a beautiful tree or flower ; a beautiful poem ; a beautiful character ; and a beautiful theorem in mathematics.

Hence we may easily perceive that, among so great a variety of objects, to find out some one quality in which they all agree, and which is the foundation of that agreeable sensation they all raise, must be a very difficult, if not more probably, a vain attempt. Objects denominated beautiful are so different, as to please, not in virtue of any one quality common to them all, but by means of several different principles in human nature. The

agreeable emotion which they all raise, is somewhat of the same nature ; and, therefore, has the common name of beauty given to it ; but it is raised by different causes.

Hypotheses, however, have been framed by ingenious men, for assigning the fundamental quality of beauty in all objects. In particular, uniformity amidst variety has been insisted on as this fundamental quality. For the beauty of many figures, I admit that this accounts in a satisfactory manner. But when we endeavour to apply this principle to beautiful objects of some other kind, as to colour, for instance, or motion, we shall soon find that it has no place. And even in external figured objects, it does not hold, that their beauty is in proportion to their mixture of variety with uniformity ; seeing many please us as highly beautiful, which have almost no variety at all ; and others, which are various to a degree of intricacy. Laying systems of this kind, therefore, aside, what I now propose is, to give an enumeration of several of those classes of objects in which beauty most remarkably appears ; and to point out, as far as I can, the separate principles of beauty in each of them.

Colour affords, perhaps, the simplest instance of beauty, and therefore the fittest to begin with. Here, neither variety, nor uniformity, nor any other principle that I know, can be assigned as



the foundation of beauty. We can refer it to no other cause but the structure of the eye, which determines us to receive certain modifications of the rays of light with more pleasure than others. And we see accordingly that, as the organ of sensation varies in different persons, they have their different favourite colours. It is probable, that association of ideas has influence, in some cases, on the pleasure which we receive from colours. Green, for instance, may appear more beautiful, by being connected in our ideas with rural prospects and scenes; white with innocence; blue with the serenity of the sky. Independent of associations of this kind, all that we can further observe concerning colours is, that those chosen for beauty are, generally, delicate, rather than glaring. Such are those paintings with which nature hath ornamented some of her works, and which art strives in vain to imitate; as the feathers of several kinds of birds, the leaves of flowers, and the fine variation of colours exhibited by the sky at the rising and setting of the sun. These present to us the highest instances of the beauty of colouring; and have accordingly been the favourite subjects of poetical description in all countries.

From colour we proceed to figure, which opens to us forms of beauty more complex and diversified. Regularity first occurs to be noticed as a source of beauty. By a regular figure, is meant, one which we perceive to be formed ac-

cording to some certain rule, and not left arbitrary, or loose, in the construction of its parts. Thus, a circle, a square, a triangle, or a hexagon, please the eye, by the regularity, as beautiful figures. We must not, however, conclude that all figures please in proportion to their regularity; or that regularity is the sole, or the chief foundation of beauty in figure. On the contrary, a certain graceful variety is found to be a much more powerful principle of beauty; and is therefore studied a great deal more than regularity, in all works that are designed merely to please the eye. I am, indeed, inclined to think, that regularity appears beautiful to us, chiefly, if not only, on account of its suggesting the ideas of fitness, propriety, and use, which have always a greater connection with orderly and proportioned forms, than with those which appear not constructed according to any certain rule. It is clear, that Nature, who is undoubtedly the most graceful artist, hath, in all her ornamental works, pursued variety, with an apparent neglect of regularity. Cabinets, doors, and windows, are made after a regular form, in cubes and parallelograms, with exact proportion of parts; and by being so formed they please the eye: for this good reason, that, being works of use, they are, by such figures, the better suited to the ends for which they were designed. But plants, flowers, and leaves are full of variety and diversity. A straight canal is an insipid figure, in comparison of the meanders of rivers. Cones and

pyramids are beautiful; but trees growing in their natural wildness, are infinitely more beautiful than when trimmed into pyramids and cones. The apartments of a house must be regular in their disposition, for the conveniency of its inhabitants; but a garden, which is designed merely for beauty, would be exceedingly disgusting, if it had as much uniformity and order in its parts as a dwelling-house.

Mr Hogarth, in his *Analysis of Beauty*, has observed, that figures bounded by curve lines are, in general, more beautiful than those bounded by straight lines and angles. He pitches upon two lines, on which, according to him, the beauty of figure principally depends; and he has illustrated and supported his doctrine, by a surprising number of instances. The one is the waving line, or a curve bending backwards and forwards, somewhat in the form of the letter S. This he calls the line of beauty; and shews how often it is found in shells, flowers, and such other ornamental works of nature; as is common also in the figures designed by painters and sculptors, for the purpose of decoration. The other line, which he calls the line of grace, is the former waving curve, twisted round some solid body. The curling worm of a common jack is one of the instances he gives of it. Twisted pillars, and twisted horns, also exhibit it. In all the instances which he mentions, variety plainly appears to be so material a prin-

ciple of beauty, that he seems not to err much when he defines the art of drawing pleasing forms, to be the art of varying well. For the curve line, so much the favourite of painters, derives, according to him, its chief advantage, from its perpetual bending and variation from the stiff regularity of the straight line.

Motion furnishes another source of beauty, distinct from figure. Motion of itself is pleasing; and bodies in motion are, "*cæteris paribus*," preferred to those in rest. It is, however, only gentle motion that belongs to the beautiful; for, when it is very swift, or very forcible, such as that of a torrent, it partakes of the sublime. The motion of a bird gliding through the air is extremely beautiful; the swiftness with which lightning darts through the heavens is magnificent and astonishing. And here, it is proper to observe, that the sensations of sublime and beautiful are not always distinguished by very distant boundaries; but are capable, in several instances, of approaching towards each other. Thus, a smooth running stream is one of the most beautiful objects in nature: as it swells gradually into a great river, the beautiful, by degrees, is lost in the sublime. A young tree is a beautiful object; a spreading ancient oak is a venerable and a grand one. The calmness of a fine morning is beautiful; the universal stillness of the evening is highly sublime. But, to return to the beauty of motion, it will be



found, I think, to hold very generally, that motion in a straight line is not so beautiful as in an undulating waving direction ; and motion upwards is, commonly too, more agreeable than motion downwards. The easy curling motion of flame and smoke may be instanced as an object singularly agreeable ; and here Mr Hogarth's waving line recurs upon us as a principle of beauty. That artist observes, very ingeniously, that all the common and necessary motions for the business of life are performed by men in straight or plain lines ; but that all the graceful and ornamental movements are made in waving lines ; an observation not unworthy of being attended to, by all who study the grace of gesture and action.

Though colour, figure, and motion, be separate principles of beauty ; yet in many beautiful objects they all meet, and thereby render the beauty both greater and more complex. Thus, in flowers, trees, animals, we are entertained at once with the delicacy of the colour, with the gracefulness of the figure, and sometimes also with the motion of the object. Although each of these produce a separate agreeable sensation, yet they are of such a similar nature, as readily to mix and blend in one general perception of beauty, which we ascribe to the whole object as its cause ; for beauty is always conceived by us as something residing in the object which raises the pleasant sensation ; a sort of glory which dwells upon, and in-



vests it. Perhaps the most complete assemblage of beautiful objects that can any where be found, is presented by a rich natural landscape, where there is a sufficient variety of objects : fields in verdure, scattered trees and flowers, running water, and animals grazing. If to these be joined some of the productions of art which suit such a scene, as a bridge with arches over a river, smoke rising from cottages in the midst of trees, and the distant view of a fine building seen by the rising sun ; we then enjoy, in the highest perfection, that gay, cheerful, and placid sensation which characterises beauty. To have an eye and a taste formed for catching the peculiar beauties of such scenes as these, is a necessary requisite for all who attempt poetical description.

The beauty of the human countenance is more complex than any that we have yet considered. It includes the beauty of colour, arising from the delicate shades of the complexion ; and the beauty of figure, arising from the lines which form the different features of the face. But the chief beauty of the countenance depends upon a mysterious expression, which it conveys of the qualities of the mind ; of good sense, or good humour ; of sprightliness, candour, benevolence, sensibility, or other amiable dispositions. How it comes to pass, that a certain conformation of features is connected in our idea with certain moral qualities ; whether we are taught by instinct, or by experience, to form

this connection, and to read the mind in the countenance, belongs not to us now to inquire, nor is indeed easy to resolve. The fact is certain, and acknowledged, that what gives the human countenance its most distinguishing beauty, is what is called its expression ; or an image, which it is conceived to shew of internal moral dispositions.

This leads us to observe, that there are certain qualities of the mind, which, whether expressed in the countenance, or by words, or by actions, always raise in us a feeling similar to that of beauty. There are two great classes of moral qualities ; one is of the high and the great virtues, which require extraordinary efforts, and turn upon dangers and sufferings ; as heroism, magnanimity, contempt of pleasures, and contempt of death. These, as I have observed in a former Lecture, excite in the spectator an emotion of sublimity and grandeur. The other class is generally of the social virtues, and such as are of a softer and gentler kind ; as compassion, mildness, friendship, and generosity. These raise in the beholder a sensation of pleasure, so much akin to that produced by beautiful external objects, that, though of a more dignified nature, it may, without impropriety, be classed under the same head.

A species of beauty, distinct from any I have yet mentioned, arises from design or art ; or, in other words, from the perception of means being

adapted to an end ; or the parts of any thing being well fitted to answer the design of the whole. When, in considering the structure of a tree, or a plant, we observe how all the parts, the roots, the stem, the bark, and the leaves, are suited to the growth and nutriment of the whole : much more when we survey all the parts and members of a living animal ; or when we examine any of the curious works of art ; such as a clock, a ship, or any nice machine ; the pleasure which we have in the survey, is wholly founded on this sense of beauty. It is altogether different from the perception of beauty produced by colour, figure, variety, or any of the causes formerly mentioned. When I look at a watch, for instance, the case of it, if finely engraved, and of curious workmanship, strikes me as beautiful in the former sense : bright colour, exquisite polish, figures finely raised and turned. But when I examine the spring and the wheels, and praise the beauty of the internal machinery ; my pleasure then arises wholly from the view of that admirable art with which so many various and complicated parts are made to unite for one purpose.

This sense of beauty, in fitness and design, has an extensive influence over many of our ideas. It is the foundation of the beauty which we discover in the proportion of doors, windows, arches, pillars, and all the orders of architecture. Let the ornaments of a building be ever so fine and ele-

gant in themselves, yet, if they interfere with this sense of fitness and design, they lose their beauty, and hurt the eye like disagreeable objects. Twisted columns, for instance, are undoubtedly ornamental; but as they have an appearance of weakness, they always displease when they are made use of to support any part of a building that is massy, and that seems to require a more substantial prop. We cannot look upon any work whatever, without being led, by a natural association of ideas to think of its end and design, and of course to examine the propriety of its parts, in relation to this design and end. When their propriety is clearly discerned, the work seems always to have some beauty; but when there is a total want of propriety, it never fails of appearing deformed. Our sense of fitness and design, therefore, is so powerful, and holds so high a rank among our perceptions, as to regulate, in a great measure, our other ideas of beauty; an observation which I the rather make, as it is of the utmost importance, that all who study composition should carefully attend to it. For in an epic poem, a history, an oration, or any work of genius, we always require, as we do in other works, a fitness or adjustment of means to the end which the author is supposed to have in view. Let his descriptions be ever so rich, or his figures ever so elegant, yet, if they are out of place, if they are not proper parts of that whole, if they suit not the main design, they lose all their beauty; nay, from beauties they are con-



verted into deformities. Such power has our sense of fitness and congruity, to produce a total transformation of an object whose appearance otherwise would have been beautiful.

After having mentioned so many various species of beauty, it now only remains to take notice of beauty as it is applied to writing or discourse; a term commonly used in a sense altogether loose and undetermined. For it is applied to all that pleases, either in style or in sentiment, from whatever principle that pleasure flows; and a beautiful poem or oration means, in common language, no other than a good one, or one well composed. In this sense, it is plain, the word is altogether indefinite, and points at no particular species or kind of beauty. There is, however, another sense, somewhat more definite, in which beauty of writing characterises a particular manner; when it is used to signify a certain grace and amæny, in the turn either of style or sentiment, for which some authors have been peculiarly distinguished. In this sense, it denotes a manner neither remarkably sublime, nor vehemently passionate, nor uncommonly sparkling; but such as raises in the reader an emotion of the gentle placid kind, similar to what is raised by the contemplation of beautiful objects in nature; which neither lifts the mind very high, nor agitates it very much, but diffuses over the imagination an agreeable and pleasing serenity. Mr Addison is a



writer altogether of this character ; and is one of the most proper and precise examples that can be given of it. Fenelon, the author of the *Adventures of Telemachus*, may be given as another example. Virgil, too, though very capable of rising on occasions into the sublime, yet, in his general manner, is distinguished by the character of beauty and grace, rather than of sublimity. Among orators, Cicero has more of the beautiful than Demosthenes, whose genius led him wholly towards vehemence and strength.

This much it is sufficient to have said upon the subject of beauty. We have traced it through a variety of forms ; as, next to sublimity, it is the most copious source of the pleasures of taste ; and as the consideration of the different appearances, and principles of beauty, tends to the improvement of taste in many subjects.

But it is not only by appearing under the forms of sublime or beautiful, that objects delight the imagination. From several other principles, also, they derive their power of giving it pleasure.

Novelty, for instance, has been mentioned by Mr Addison, and by every writer on this subject. An object which has no merit to recommend it, except its being uncommon or new, by means of this quality alone, produces in the mind a vivid

and an agreeable emotion. Hence that passion of curiosity, which prevails so generally among mankind. Objects and ideas which have been long familiar, make too faint an impression to give an agreeable exercise to our faculties. New and strange objects rouse the mind from its dormant state, by giving it a quick and pleasing impulse. Hence, in a great measure, the entertainment afforded us by fiction and romance. The emotion raised by novelty is of a more lively and pungent nature than that produced by beauty; but much shorter in its continuance. For if the object have in itself no charms to hold our attention, the shining gloss thrown upon it by novelty soon wears off.

Besides novelty, imitation is another source of pleasure to taste. This gives rise to what Mr Addison terms the secondary pleasures of imagination; which form, doubtless, a very extensive class. For all imitation affords some pleasure; not only the imitation of beautiful or great objects, by recalling the original ideas of beauty or grandeur which such objects themselves exhibited; but even objects which have neither beauty nor grandeur, nay, some which are terrible or deformed, please us in a secondary or represented view.

The pleasures of melody and harmony belong also to taste. There is no agreeable sensation we receive either from beauty or sublimity, but what is capable of being heightened by the power

of musical sound. Hence, the delight of poetical numbers ; and even of the more concealed and looser measures of prose. Wit, humour, and ridicule likewise open a variety of pleasures to taste, quite distinct from any that we have yet considered.

At present it is not necessary to pursue any farther the subject of the pleasures of taste. I have opened some of the general principles ; it is time now to make the application to our chief subject. If the question be put, to what class of those pleasures of taste which I have enumerated, that pleasure is to be referred, which we receive from poetry, eloquence, or fine writing ? My answer is, not to any one, but to them all. This singular advantage writing and discourse possess, that they encompass so large and rich a field on all sides, and have power to exhibit, in great perfection, not a single set of objects only, but almost the whole of those which give pleasure to taste and imagination ; whether that pleasure arise from sublimity, from beauty in its different forms, from design and art, from moral sentiment, from novelty, from harmony, from wit, humour, and ridicule. To whichever of these the peculiar bent of a person's taste lies, from some writer or other he has it always in his power to receive the gratification of it.

Now this high power which eloquence and poetry possess, of supplying taste and imagination

with such a wide circle of pleasures, they derive altogether from their having a greater capacity of imitation and description than is possessed by any other art. Of all the means which human ingenuity has contrived for recalling the images of real objects, and awakening, by representation, similar emotions to those which are raised by the original, none is so full and extensive as that which is executed by words and writing. Through the assistance of this happy invention, there is nothing, either in the natural or moral world, but what can be represented and set before the mind, in colours very strong and lively. Hence, it is usual among critical writers to speak of discourse as the chief of all the imitative or mimetic arts; they compare it with painting and with sculpture, and in many respects prefer it justly before them.

This style was first introduced by Aristotle in his *Poetics*; and, since his time, has acquired a general currency among modern authors. But, as it is of consequence to introduce as much precision as possible into critical language, I must observe, that this manner of speaking is not accurate. Neither discourse in general, nor poetry in particular, can be called altogether imitative arts. We must distinguish betwixt imitation and description, which are ideas that should not be confounded. Imitation is performed by means of somewhat that has a natural likeness and resemblance to the thing imitated; and of consequence is understood by all;



such are statues and pictures. Description, again, is the raising in the mind the conception of an object by means of some arbitrary or instituted symbols, understood only by those who agree in the institution of them; such are words and writing. Words have no natural resemblance to the ideas or objects which they are employed to signify; but a statue or picture has a natural likeness to the original. And therefore imitation and description differ considerably in their nature from each other.

As far, indeed, as the poet introduces into his work persons actually speaking; and, by the words which he puts into their mouths, represents the discourse which they might be supposed to hold; so far his art may more accurately be called imitative: and this is the case in all dramatic composition. But, in narrative or descriptive works, it can with no propriety be called so. Who, for instance, would call Virgil's description of a tempest in the first *Æneid*, an imitation of a storm? If we heard of the imitation of a battle, we might naturally think of some mock fight, or representation of a battle on the stage, but would never apprehend that it meant one of Homer's descriptions in the *Iliad*. I admit, at the same time, that imitation and description agree in their principal effect, of recalling, by external signs, the ideas of things which they do not see. But though in this they coincide, yet it should not be forgotten, that the terms themselves are not synonymous; that they



import different means of effecting the same end; and of course make different impressions on the mind \*.

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\* Though in the execution of particular parts, poetry is certainly descriptive rather than imitative, yet there is a qualified sense, in which poetry, in the general, may be termed an imitative art. The subject of the poet (as Dr Gerard has shewn in the appendix to his Essay on Taste) is intended to be an imitation, not of things really existing, but of the course of nature; that is, a feigned representation of such events, or such scenes, as, though they never had a being, yet might have existed; and which, therefore, by their probability, bear a resemblance to nature. It was probably in this sense that Aristotle termed poetry a mimetic art. How far either the imitation or the description which poetry employs, is superior to the imitative powers of painting and music, is well shewn by Mr Harris, in his Treatise on Music, Painting, and Poetry. The chief advantage which poetry, or discourse in general, enjoys, is, that whereas, by the nature of his art, the painter is confined to the representation of a single moment, writing and discourse can trace a transaction through its whole progress. That moment, indeed, which the painter pitches upon for the subject of his picture, he may be said to exhibit with more advantage than the poet or orator; inasmuch as he sets before us, in one view, all the minute concurrent circumstances of the event which happens in one individual point of time, as they appear in nature; while discourse is obliged to exhibit them in succession, and by means of a detail, which is in danger of becoming tedious, in order to be clear; or, if not tedious, is in danger of being obscure. But to that point of time which he has chosen, the painter being entirely confined, he cannot exhibit various stages of the same action or event; and he is subject to this farther defect, that he can only exhibit objects as they appear to the eye, and can very imperfectly delineate characters and sentiments, which are the noblest subjects of imitation or description. The power of representing these with full advantage, gives a high superiority to discourse and writing, above all other imitative arts.

Whether we consider poetry in particular, and discourse in general, as imitative or descriptive, it is evident, that their whole power in recalling the impressions of real objects, is derived from the significancy of words. As their excellency flows altogether from this source, we must, in order to make way for further inquiries, begin at this fountain-head. I shall, therefore, in the next Lecture, enter upon the consideration of Language ; of the origin, the progress, and construction of which, I purpose to treat at some length.

## LECTURE VI.

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### RISE AND PROGRESS OF LANGUAGE.

**H**AVING finished my observations on the Pleasures of Taste, which were meant to be introductory to the principal subject of these Lectures, I now begin to treat of Language; which is the foundation of the whole power of eloquence. This will lead to a considerable discussion; and there are few subjects belonging to polite literature which more merit such a discussion. I shall first give a history of the rise and progress of language in several particulars, from its early to its more advanced periods; which shall be followed by a similar history of the rise and progress of writing. I shall next give some account of the construction of language, or the principles of universal grammar; and shall, lastly, apply these observations more particularly to the English tongue\*.

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\* See Dr Adam Smith's Dissertation on the Formation of Languages.—Treatise of the Origin and Progress of Language, in 3 vols.—Harris's Hermes, or a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Language and Universal Grammar.—Essai sur l'Origine

Language, in general, signifies the expression of our ideas by certain articulate sounds, which are used as the signs of those ideas. By articulate sounds are meant those modulations of simple voice, or of sound emitted from the thorax, which are formed by means of the mouth and its several organs, the teeth, the tongue, the lips, and the palate. How far there is any natural connection between the ideas of the mind and the sounds emitted, will appear from what I have afterwards to offer. But as the natural connection can, upon any system, affect only a small part of the fabric of language; the connection between words and ideas may, in general, be considered as arbitrary and conventional, owing to the agreement of men among themselves; the clear proof of which is, that different nations have different languages, or a different set of articulate sounds which they have chosen for communicating their ideas.

This artificial method of communicating thought we now behold carried to the highest perfection. Language is become a vehicle by

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des Connoissances Humaines, par l'Abbé Condillac.—Principes de Grammaire, par Marsais.—Grammaire Generale et Raisonnée.—Traité de la Formation Mechanique des Langues, par le President de Brosses.—Discours sur l'Inegalité parmi les Hommes, par Rousseau.—Grammaire Generale, par Beauzée.—Principes de la Traduction, par Batteux.—Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses, vol. iii.—Sanctii Minerva, cum Notis Perizonii.—Les Vrais Principes de la Langue Francoise, par l'Abbé Girard.

which the most delicate and refined emotions of one mind can be transmitted, or, if we may so speak, transfused into another. Not only are names given to all objects around us, by which means an easy and speedy intercourse is carried on for providing the necessaries of life, but all the relations and differences among these objects are minutely marked, the invisible sentiments of the mind are described, the most abstract notions and conceptions are rendered intelligible; and all the ideas which science can discover, or imagination create, are known by their proper names. Nay, language has been carried so far, as to be made an instrument of the most refined luxury. Not resting in mere perspicuity, we require ornament also; not satisfied with having the conceptions of others made known to us, we make a further demand, to have them so decked and adorned as to entertain our fancy; and this demand, it is found very possible to gratify. In this state we now find language. In this state it has been found among many nations for some thousand years. The object is become familiar; and like the expanse of the firmament, and other great objects, which we are accustomed to behold, we behold it without wonder.

But carry your thoughts back to the first dawn of language among men. Reflect upon the feeble beginnings from which it must have arisen, and upon the many and great obstacles which it must



have encountered in its progress ; and you will find reason for the highest astonishment on viewing the height which it has now attained. We admire several of the inventions of art ; we plume ourselves on some discoveries which have been made in latter ages, serving to advance knowledge, and to render life comfortable : we speak of them as the boast of human reason. But certainly no invention is entitled to any such degree of admiration as that of language ; which, too, must have been the product of the first and rudest ages, if, indeed, it can be considered as a human invention at all.

Think of the circumstances of mankind when language began to be formed. They were a wandering scattered race ; no society among them except families ; and the family society too very imperfect, as their method of living by hunting or pasturage must have separated them frequently from one another. In this situation, when so much divided, and their intercourse so rare, how could any one set of sounds, or words, be generally agreed on as the signs of their ideas ? Supposing that a few, whom chance or necessity threw together, agreed by some means upon certain signs, yet by what authority could these be propagated among other tribes or families, so as to spread and grow up into a language ? One would think that, in order to any language fixing and extending itself, men must have been previously gathered together in considerable numbers ; society must

have been already far advanced ; and yet on the other hand, there seems to have been an absolute necessity for speech, previous to the formation of society. For, by what bond could any multitude of men be kept together, or be made to join in the prosecution of any common interest, until once, by the intervention of speech, they could communicate their wants and intentions to one another ? So that, either how society could form itself previously to language, or how words could rise into a language previously to society formed, seem to be points attended with equal difficulty. And when we consider, farther, that curious analogy which prevails in the construction of almost all languages, and that deep and subtle logic on which they are founded, difficulties increase so much upon us, on all hands, that there seems to be no small reason for referring the first origin of all language to divine teaching or inspiration.

But supposing language to have a divine original, we cannot, however, suppose that a perfect system of it was all at once given to man. It is much more natural to think, that God taught our first parents only such language as suited their present occasions ; leaving them, as he did in other things, to enlarge and improve it as their future necessities should require. Consequently, those first rudiments of speech must have been poor and narrow ; and we are at full liberty to inquire in what manner, and by what steps, lan-

guage advanced to the state in which we now find it. The history which I am to give of this progress will suggest several things both curious in themselves, and useful in our future disquisitions.

If we should suppose a period before any words were invented or known, it is clear, that men could have no other method of communicating to others what they felt, than by the cries of passion, accompanied with such motions and gestures as were farther expressive of passion. For these are the only signs which nature teaches all men, and which are understood by all. One who saw another going into some place where he himself had been frightened or exposed to danger, and who sought to warn his neighbour of the danger, could contrive no other way of doing so, than by uttering those cries, and making those gestures, which are the signs of fear, just as two men, at this day, would endeavour to make themselves be understood by each other, who should be thrown together on a desolate island, ignorant of each other's language. Those exclamations, therefore, which by grammarians are called interjections, uttered in a strong and passionate manner, were, beyond doubt, the first elements or beginnings of speech.

When more enlarged communications became necessary, and names began to be assigned to objects, in what manner can we suppose men to have proceeded in this assignation of names, or

invention of words? Undoubtedly, by imitating, as much as they could, the nature of the object which they named, by the sound of the name which they gave to it. As a painter, who would represent grass, must employ a green colour; so, in the beginnings of language, one giving a name to any thing harsh or boisterous, would of course employ a harsh or boisterous sound. He could not do otherwise, if he meant to excite in the hearer the idea of that thing which he sought to name. To suppose words invented, or names given to things, in a manner purely arbitrary, without any ground or reason, is to suppose an effect without a cause. There must have always been some motive which led to the assignation of one name rather than another; and we can conceive no motive which would more generally operate upon men in their first efforts towards language, than a desire to paint, by speech, the objects which they named, in a manner more or less complete, according as the vocal organs had it in their power to effect this imitation.

Wherever objects were to be named, in which sound, noise, or motion were concerned, the imitation by words was abundantly obvious. Nothing was more natural, than to imitate, by the sound of the voice, the quality of the sound or noise which any external object made; and to form its name accordingly. Thus, in all languages, we find a multitude of words that are evidently constructed



upon this principle. A certain bird is termed the cuckoo, from the sound which it emits. When one sort of wind is said to *whistle*, and another to *roar*; when a serpent is said to *hiss*, a fly to *buz*, and falling timber to *crash*; when a stream is said to *flow*, and hail to *rattle*; the analogy between the word and the thing signified is plainly discernible.

In the names of objects which address the sight only, where neither noise nor motion are concerned, and still more in the terms appropriated to moral ideas, this analogy appears to fail. Many learned men, however, have been of opinion, that though, in such cases, it becomes more obscure, yet it is not altogether lost; but that throughout the radical words of all languages, there may be traced some degree of correspondence with the object signified. With regard to moral and intellectual ideas, they remark, that, in every language, the terms significant of them, are derived from the names of sensible objects to which they are conceived to be analogous; and with regard to sensible objects pertaining merely to sight, they remark, that their most distinguishing qualities have certain radical sounds appropriated to the expression of them, in a great variety of languages. Stability, for instance, fluidity, hollowness, smoothness, gentleness, violence, &c. they imagine to be painted by the sound of certain letters or syllables, which have some relation to those different states



of visible objects, on account of an obscure resemblance which the organs of voice are capable of assuming to such external qualities. By this natural mechanism, they imagine all languages to have been at first constructed, and the roots of their capital words formed \*.

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\* The author, who has carried his speculations on this subject the farthest, is the President Des Brosses, in his "Traité de la Formation Mechanique des Langues." Some of the radical letters or syllables which he supposes to carry this expressive power in most known languages are, St, to signify stability or rest; Fl, to denote fluency; Cl, a gentle descent; R, what relates to rapid motion; C, to cavity or hollowness, &c. A century before his time, Dr Wallis, in his Grammar of the English Language, had taken notice of these significant roots, and represented it as a peculiar excellency of our tongue, that, beyond all others, it expressed the nature of the objects which it named, by employing sounds sharper, softer, weaker, stronger, more obscure, or more stridulous, according as the idea which is to be suggested requires. He gives various examples. Thus; words formed upon St, always denote firmness and strength, analogous to the Latin *sto*; as, stand, stay, staff, stop, stout, steady, stake, stamp, stallion, stately, &c. Words beginning with Str, intimate violent force and energy, analogous to the Greek *στρογγυλός*; as, strive, strength, strike, stripe, stress, struggle, stride, stretch, strip, &c. Thr, implies forcible motion; as, throw, throb, thrust, through, threaten, thralldom. Wr, obliquity or distortion; as, wry, wrest, wreath, wrestle, wring, wrong, wrangle, wrath, wrack, &c. Sw, silent agitation, or lateral motion; as, sway, swing, swerve, sweep, swim. Sl, a gentle fall, or less observable motion, as, slide, slip, sly, slit, slow, slack, sling. Sp, dissipation or expansion; as, spread, sprout, sprinkle, split, spill, spring. Terminations in Ash, indicate something acting nimbly and

As far as this system is founded in truth, language appears to be not altogether arbitrary in its origin. Among the ancient Stoic and Platonic philosophers, it was a question much agitated. "Utrum nomina rerum sint naturâ, an impositione? *φύσει η θεωρί*;" by which they meant, Whether words were merely conventional symbols; of the rise of which no account could be given, except the pleasure of the first inventors of language? or, Whether there was some principle in nature that led to the assignation of particular names to particular objects? and those of the Platonic school favoured the latter opinion \*.

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sharply; as, crash, gash, rash, flash, lash, slash. Terminations in Ush, something acting more obtusely and dully; as, crush, brush, hush, gush, blush. The learned author produces a great many more examples of the same kind, which seem to leave no doubt, that the analogies of sound have had some influence on the formation of words. At the same time, in all speculations of this kind, there is so much room for fancy to operate, that they ought to be adopted with much caution in forming any general theory.

\* Vid. Plat. in Cratylô. "Nomina verbaque non posita fortuito, sed quadam vi et ratione naturæ facta esse, P. Nigidius in Grammaticis Commentariis docet; rem sane in philosophiæ dissertationibus celebrem. In eam rem multa argumenta dicit, cur videri possint verba esse naturalia, magis quàm arbitraria. Vos, inquit, cum dicimus, motu quodam oris conveniente, cum ipsius verbi demonstratione utimur, et labias sensim primores emovemus, ac spiritum atque animam porro versum, et ad eos quibus consermocinamur intendimus.

This principle, however, of a natural relation between words and objects, can only be applied to language in its most simple and primitive state. Though in every tongue, some remains of it, as I have shewn above, can be traced, it were utterly in vain to search for it throughout the whole construction of any modern language. As the multitude of terms increase in every nation, and the immense field of language is filled up, words, by a thousand fanciful and irregular methods of derivation and composition, come to deviate widely from the primitive character of their roots, and to lose all analogy or resemblance in sound to the thing signified. In this state we now find language. Words, as we now employ them, taken in the general, may be considered as symbols, not as imitations; as arbitrary, or instituted, not natural signs of ideas. But there can be no doubt, I think, that language, the nearer we remount to its rise among men, will be found to partake more of a natural expression. As it could be

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“ At contra cum dicimus *Nos*, neque profuso intentoque flatu  
“ vocis, neque projectis labiis pronunciamus; sed et spiritum et  
“ labias quasi intra nosmet ipsos coërcemus. Hoc sit idem et in  
“ eo quod dicimus, *tu*, et *ego*, et *mihî*, et *tibi*. Nam sicuti cum  
“ adnuimus et abnuimus, motus quodam illo vel capitis, vel ocu-  
“ lorum, a natura rei quam significat, non abhorret, ita in his  
“ vocibus quasi gestus quidam oris et spiritus naturalis est. Ea-  
“ dem ratio est in Græcis quoque vocibus quam esse in nostris  
“ animadvertimus.”

A. GELLIUS, Noct. Atticæ, lib. x. cap. 4.

originally formed on nothing but imitation, it would, in its primitive state, be more picturesque; much more barren indeed, and narrow in the circle of its terms, than now; but as far as it went, more expressive by sound of the thing signified. This, then, may be assumed as one character of the first state, or beginnings, of language, among every savage tribe.

A second character of language, in its early state, is drawn from the manner in which words were at first pronounced, or uttered by men. Interjections, I shewed, or passionate exclamations, were the first elements of speech. Men laboured to communicate their feelings to one another, by those expressive cries and gestures which nature taught them. After words, or names of objects, began to be invented, this mode of speaking, by natural signs, could not be all at once disused. For language, in its infancy, must have been extremely barren; and there certainly was a period, among all rude nations, when conversation was carried on by very few words, intermixed with many exclamations and earnest gestures. The small stock of words which men as yet possessed, rendered these helps absolutely necessary for explaining their conceptions; and rude, uncultivated men, not having always at hand even the few words which they knew, would naturally labour to make themselves understood, by varying their tones of voice, and accompanying their tones with



the most significant gesticulations they could make. At this day, when persons attempt to speak in any language which they possess imperfectly, they have recourse to all these supplemental methods, in order to render themselves more intelligible. The plan, too, according to which I have shewn that language was originally constructed, upon resemblance or analogy, as far as was possible, to the thing signified, would naturally lead men to utter their words with more emphasis and force, as long as language was a sort of painting by means of sound. For all those reasons, this may be assumed as a principle, that the pronunciation of the earliest languages was accompanied with more gesticulation, and with more and greater inflexions of voice, than what we now use; there was more action in it; and it was more upon a crying or singing tone.

To this manner of speaking, necessity first gave rise. But we must observe that, after this necessity had, in a great measure, ceased, by language becoming, in process of time, more extensive and copious, the ancient manner of speech still subsisted among many nations; and what had arisen from necessity continued to be used for ornament. Wherever there was much fire and vivacity in the genius of nations, they were naturally inclined to a mode of conversation which gratified the imagination so much; for, an imagination which is warm, is always prone to throw both a great deal



of action, and a variety of tones, into discourse. Upon this principle, Dr Warburton accounts for so much speaking by action, as we find among the Old Testament prophets; as when Jeremiah breaks the potter's vessel, in sight of the people; throws a book into the Euphrates; puts on bonds and yokes; and carries out his household stuff; all which, he imagines, might be significant modes of expression, very natural in those ages, when men were accustomed to explain themselves so much by actions and gestures. In like manner, among the Northern American tribes, certain motions and actions were found to be much used, as explanatory of their meaning, on all their great occasions of intercourse with each other; and by the belts and strings of wampum, which they gave and received, they were accustomed to declare their meaning, as much as by their discourse.

With regard to inflexions of voice, these are so natural, that, to some nations, it has appeared easier to express different ideas, by varying the tone with which they pronounced the same word, than to contrive words for all their ideas. This is the practice of the Chinese in particular. The number of words in their language is said not to be great; but, in speaking, they vary each of their words on no less than five different tones, by which they make the same word signify five different things. This must give a great appearance of music, or singing, to their speech. For those

inflexions of voice, which, in the infancy of language, were no more than harsh or dissonant cries, must, as language gradually polishes, pass into more smooth and musical sounds; and hence is formed what we call the prosody of a language.

It is remarkable, and deserves attention, that both in the Greek and Roman languages, this musical and gesticulating pronunciation was retained in a very high degree. Without having attended to this, we shall be at a loss in understanding several passages of the classics, which relate to the public speaking, and the theatrical entertainments of the ancients. It appears, from many circumstances, that the prosody both of the Greeks and Romans was carried much farther than ours, or that they spoke with more, and stronger, inflexions of voice than we use. The quantity of their syllables was much more fixed than in any of the modern languages, and rendered much more sensible to the ear in pronouncing them. Besides quantities, or the difference of short and long, accents were placed upon most of their syllables, the acute, grave, and circumflex; the use of which accents we have now entirely lost, but which, we know, determined the speaker's voice to rise or fall. Our modern pronunciation must have appeared to them a lifeless monotony. The declamation of their orators, and the pronunciation of their actors upon the stage, approached to the

nature of a recitative in music; was capable of being marked in notes, and supported with instruments, as several learned men have fully proved. And if this was the case, as they have shewn, among the Romans, the Greeks, it is well known, were still a more musical people than the Romans, and carried their attention to tone and pronunciation much farther in every public exhibition. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, considers the music of tragedy as one of its chief and most essential parts.

The case was parallel with regard to gesture: for strong tones, and animated gestures, we may observe, always go together. Action is treated of, by all the ancient critics, as the chief quality in every public speaker. The action, both of the orators and the players in Greece and Rome, was far more vehement than what we are accustomed to. Roscius would have seemed a madman to us. Gesture was of such consequence upon the ancient stage, that there is reason for believing that, on some occasions, the speaking and the acting part were divided, which, according to our ideas, would form a strange exhibition; one player spoke the words in the proper tones, while another performed the corresponding motions and gestures. We learn from Cicero, that it was a contest between him and Roscius, whether he could express a sentiment in a greater variety of phrases, or Roscius in a greater variety of intel-

ligible significant gestures. At last gesture came to engross the stage wholly; for, under the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, the favourite entertainment of the public was the pantomime, which was carried on entirely by mute gesticulation. The people were moved, and wept at it, as much as at tragedies; and the passion for it became so strong, that laws were obliged to be made for restraining the senators from studying the pantomime art. Now, though in declarations and theatrical exhibitions, both tone and gesture were, doubtless, carried much farther than in common discourse; yet public speaking of any kind must, in every country, bear some proportion to the manner that is used in conversation; and such public entertainments as I have now mentioned, could never have been relished by a nation, whose tones and gestures, in discourse, were as languid as ours.

When the barbarians spread themselves over the Roman empire, these more phlegmatic nations did not retain the accents, the tones, and gestures, which necessity at first introduced, and custom and fancy afterwards so long supported, in the Greek and Roman languages. As the Latin tongue was lost in their idioms, so the character of speech and pronunciation began to be changed throughout Europe. Nothing of the same attention was paid to the music of language, or to the pomp of declamation and theatrical action. Both



conversation and public speaking became more simple and plain, such as we now find it; without that enthusiastic mixture of tones and gestures, which distinguished the ancient nations. At the restoration of letters, the genius of language was so much altered, and the manners of the people had become so different, that it was no easy matter to understand what the ancients had said, concerning their declamations and public spectacles. Our plain manner of speaking, in these northern countries, expresses the passions with sufficient energy to move those who are not accustomed to any more vehement manner. But, undoubtedly, more varied tones, and more animated motions, carry a natural expression of warmer feelings. Accordingly, in different modern languages, the prosody of speech partakes more of music, in proportion to the liveliness and sensibility of the people. A Frenchman both varies his accents, and gesticulates while he speaks, much more than an Englishman; an Italian, a great deal more than either. Musical pronunciation and expressive gesture are, to this day, the distinction of Italy.

From the pronunciation of language, let us proceed, in the third place, to consider the style of language in its most early state, and its progress in this respect also. As the manner in which men at first uttered their words, and maintained conversation was strong and expressive, enforcing their imperfectly expressed ideas by cries and ges-



tures ; so the language which they used, could be no other than full of figures and metaphors, not correct indeed, but forcible and picturesque.

We are apt, upon a superficial view, to imagine that those modes of expression which are called figures of speech, are among the chief refinements of speech, not invented till after language had advanced to its later periods, and mankind were brought into a polished state ; and that, then, they were devised by orators and rhetoricians. The contrary of this is the truth. Mankind never employed so many figures of speech, as when they had hardly any words for expressing their meaning.

For, first, the want of proper names for every object obliged them to use one name for many ; and, of course, to express themselves by comparisons, metaphors, allusions, and all those substituted forms of speech which render language figurative. Next, as the objects with which they were most conversant, were the sensible, material objects around them, names would be given to those objects long before words were invented for signifying the dispositions of the mind, or any sort of moral and intellectual ideas. Hence the early language of men being entirely made up of words descriptive of sensible objects, it became, of necessity, extremely metaphorical. For, to signify any desire or passion, or any act or feeling of the mind,

they had no precise expression which was appropriated to that purpose, but were under a necessity of painting the emotion, or passion, which they felt, by allusion to those sensible objects which had most relation to it, and which could render it, in some sort, visible to others.

But it was not necessity alone that gave rise to this figured style. Other circumstances also, at the commencement of language, contributed to it. In the infancy of all societies, men are much under the dominion of imagination and passion. They live scattered and dispersed : they are unacquainted with the course of things ; they are, every day, meeting with new and strange objects. Fear and surprise, wonder and astonishment, are their most frequent passions. Their language will necessarily partake of this character of their minds. They will be prone to exaggeration and hyperbole. They will be given to describe every thing with the strongest colours, and most vehement expressions ; infinitely more than men living in the advanced and cultivated periods of society, when their imagination is more chastened, their passions are more tamed, and a wider experience has rendered the objects of life more familiar to them. Even the manner in which I before showed that the first tribes of men uttered their words, would have considerable influence on their style. Wherever strong exclamations, tones, and gestures, enter much into conversation, the imagination is always

more exercised; a greater effort of fancy and passion is excited. Consequently, the fancy, kept awake, and rendered more sprightly by this mode of utterance, operates upon style, and enlivens it more.

These reasonings are confirmed by undoubted facts. The style of all the most early languages, among nations who are in the first and rude periods of society, is found, without exception, to be full of figures; hyperbolical and picturesque in a high degree. We have a striking instance of this in the American languages, which are known, by the most authentic accounts, to be figurative to excess. The Iroquois and Illinois carry on their treaties and public transactions with bolder metaphors, and greater pomp of style than we use in our poetical productions \*.

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\* Thus, to give an instance of the singular style of these nations, the Five nations of Canada, when entering on a treaty of peace with us, expressed themselves by their chiefs, in the following language: " We are happy in having buried under  
" ground the red axe, that has so often been dyed with the blood  
" of our brethren. Now, in this sort, we inter the axe, and  
" plant the tree of peace. We plant a tree whose top will  
" reach the sun, and its branches spread abroad, so that it  
" shall be seen afar off. May its growth never be stifled and  
" choked; but may it shade both your country and ours with  
" its leaves! Let us make fast its roots, and extend them to  
" the utmost of our colonies. If the French should come to  
" shake this tree, we would know it by the motion of its roots  
" reaching into our country. May the Great Spirit allow us  
" to rest in tranquillity upon our mats, and never again dig up

Another remarkable instance is, the style of the Old Testament, which is carried on by constant allusions to sensible objects. Iniquity, or guilt, is expressed by "a spotted garment;" misery, by "drinking the cup of astonishment;" vain pursuits, by "feeding on ashes;" a sinful life, by "a crooked path;" prosperity, by "the candle of the Lord shining on our head;" and the like, in innumerable instances. Hence we have been accustomed to call this sort of style the Oriental Style; as fancying it to be peculiar to the nations of the East; whereas, from the American style, and from many other instances, it plainly appears not to have been peculiar to any one region or climate; but to have been common to all nations in certain periods of society and language.

Hence we may receive some light concerning that seeming paradox, that poetry is more ancient than prose. I shall have occasion to discuss this

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"the axe to cut down the tree of peace: Let the earth be trod hard over it, where it lies buried. Let a strong stream run under the pit, to wash the evil away out of our sight and remembrance. The fire that had long burned in Albany is extinguished. The bloody bed is washed clean, and the tears are wiped from our eyes. We now renew the covenant chain of friendship. Let it be kept bright and clean as silver, and not suffered to contract any rust. Let not any one pull away his arm from it." These passages are extracted from Cadwalader Colden's History of the Five Indian nations: where it appears, from the authentic documents he produces, that such is their genuine style.



point fully hereafter, when I come to treat of the nature and origin of poetry. At present, it is sufficient to observe, that, from what has been said, it plainly appears that the style of all language must have been originally poetical; strongly tinged with that enthusiasm, and that descriptive metaphorical expression, which distinguishes poetry.

As language, in its progress, began to grow more copious, it gradually lost that figurative style which was its early character. When men were furnished with proper and familiar names for every object, both sensible and moral, they were not obliged to use so many circumlocutions. Style became more precise, and, of course, more simple. Imagination too, in proportion as society advanced, had less influence over mankind. The vehement manner of speaking by tones and gestures began to be disused. The understanding was more exercised; the fancy, less. Intercourse among mankind becoming more extensive and frequent, clearness of style, in signifying their meaning to each other, was the chief object of attention. In place of poets, philosophers became the instructors of men; and in their reasonings on all different subjects, introduced that plainer and simpler style of composition which we now call prose. Among the Greeks, Pherecydes of Scyros, the master of Pythagoras, is recorded to have been the first who, in this sense, composed any writing in prose.



The ancient metaphorical and poetical dress of language was now laid aside from the intercourse of men, and reserved for those occasions only on which ornament was professedly studied.

Thus I have pursued the history of language through some of the variations it has undergone: I have considered it, in the first structure and composition of words; in the manner of uttering or pronouncing words; and in the style and character of speech. I have yet to consider it in another view, respecting the order and arrangement of words; when we shall find a progress to have taken place, similar to what I have been now illustrating.

## LECTURE VII.

### RISE AND PROGRESS OF LANGUAGE, AND OF WRITING.

**W**HEN we attend to the order in which words are arranged in a sentence, or significant proposition, we find a very remarkable difference between the ancient and the modern tongues. The consideration of this will serve to unfold farther the genius of language, and to shew the causes of those alterations which it has undergone in the progress of society.

In order to conceive distinctly the nature of that alteration of which I now speak, let us go back, as we did formerly, to the most early period of language. Let us figure to ourselves a savage, who beholds some object, such as fruit, which raises his desire, and who requests another to give it to him. Supposing our savage to be unacquainted with words, he would, in that case, labour to make himself be understood, by pointing earnestly at the object which he desired, and uttering

at the same time a passionate cry. Supposing him to have acquired words, the first word which he uttered would, of course, be the name of that object. He would not express himself, according to our English order of construction, "Give me fruit;" but, according to the Latin order, "Fruit give me;" "Fructum da mihi." For this plain reason, that his attention was wholly directed towards fruit, the desired object. This was the exciting idea; the object which moved him to speak; and, of course, would be the first named. Such an arrangement is precisely putting into words the gesture which nature taught the savage to make before he was acquainted with words; and therefore it may be depended upon as certain, that he would fall most readily into this arrangement.

Accustomed now to a different method of ordering our words, we call this an inversion, and consider it as a forced and unnatural order of speech. But though not the most logical, it is, however, in one view, the most natural order; because it is the order suggested by imagination and desire, which always impel us to mention their object in the first place. We might therefore conclude, *à priori*, that this would be the order in which words were most commonly arranged at the beginnings of language; and accordingly we find, in fact, that, in this order, words are arranged in most of the ancient tongues; as in the Greek and

the Latin; and it is said also, in the Russian, the Slavonic, the Gaelic, and several of the American tongues.

In the Latin language, the arrangement which most commonly obtains, is, to place first in the sentence that word which expresses the principal object of the discourse, together with its circumstances; and afterwards the person, or the thing that acts upon it. Thus Sallust, comparing together the mind and the body: “*Animi imperio, corporis servitio, magis utimur;*” which order certainly renders the sentence more lively and striking than when it is arranged according to our English construction: “We make most use of the direction of the soul, and of the service of the body.” The Latin order gratifies more the rapidity of the imagination, which naturally runs first to that which is its chief object; and having once named it, carries it in view throughout the rest of the sentence. In the same manner in poetry:

*Justum et tenacem propositi virum,  
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
Non vultus instantis tyranni,  
Mente quatinus solida.——*

Every person of taste must be sensible, that here the words are arranged with a much greater regard to the figure which the several objects make in the fancy, than our English construction admits; which would require the “*Justum et tenacem propositi*

“virum,” though, undoubtedly, the capital object in the sentence, to be thrown into the last place.

I have said, that in the Greek and Roman languages, the most common arrangement is, to place that first which strikes the imagination of the speaker most. I do not, however, pretend that this holds without exception. Sometimes regard to the harmony of the period requires a different order; and in languages susceptible of so much musical beauty, and pronounced with so much tone and modulation as were used by those nations, the harmony of periods was an object carefully studied. Sometimes, too, attention to the perspicuity, to the force, or to the artful suspension of the speaker's meaning, alter this order; and produce such varieties in the arrangement, that it is not easy to reduce them to any one principle. But, in general, this was the genius and character of most of the ancient languages, to give such full liberty to the collocation of words, as allowed them to assume whatever order was most agreeable to the speaker's imagination. The Hebrew is indeed an exception; which, though not altogether without inversions, yet employs them less frequently, and approaches nearer to the English construction than either the Greek or the Latin.

All the modern languages of Europe have adopted a different arrangement from the ancient. In their prose compositions, very little variety is



admitted in the collocation of words; they are mostly fixed to one order; and that order is, what may be called the order of the understanding. They place first in the sentence, the person or thing which speaks or acts; next its action; and, lastly, the object of its action. So that the ideas are made to succeed to one another, not according to the degree of importance which the several objects carry in the imagination, but according to the order of nature and of time.

An English writer, paying a compliment to a great man, would say thus: "It is impossible for me to pass over in silence such remarkable mildness, such singular and unheard-of clemency, and such unusual moderation in the exercise of supreme power." Here we have first presented to us the person who speaks, "It is impossible for *me*;" next, what that person is to do, "impossible for him *to pass over in silence*;" and lastly, the object which moves him so to do, "the mildness, clemency, and moderation of his patron." Cicero, from whom I have translated these words, just reverses this order; beginning with the object, placing that first which was the exciting idea in the speaker's mind, and ending with the speaker and his action. "*Tantum* mansuetudinem, tam inusitatam inauditamque clementiam, tantumque in summa potestate rerum omnium modum, tacitus nullo modo præterire possum." (Orat. pro Marcell.)

The Latin order is more animated; the English more clear and distinct. The Romans generally arranged their words according to the order in which the ideas rose in the speaker's imagination. We arrange them according to the order in which the understanding directs those ideas to be exhibited, in succession, to the view of another. Our arrangement, therefore, appears to be the consequence of greater refinement in the art of speech; as far as clearness in communication is understood to be the end of speech.

In poetry, where we are supposed to rise above the ordinary style, and to speak the language of fancy and passion, our arrangement is not altogether so limited; but some greater liberty is allowed for transposition and inversion. Even there, however, that liberty is confined within narrow bounds, in comparison of the ancient languages. The different modern tongues vary from one another in this respect. The French language is, of them all, the most determinate in the order of its words, and admits the least of inversion, either in prose or poetry. The English admits it more. But the Italian retains the most of the ancient transpositive character; though one is apt to think it attended with a little obscurity in the style of some of their authors, who deal most in these transpositions.

It is proper, next, to observe, that there is one circumstance in the structure of all the modern

tongues, which, if necessary, limits their arrangement, in a great measure, to one fixed and determinate train. We have disused those differences of termination, which, in the Greek and Latin, distinguished the several cases of nouns, and tenses of verbs; and which, thereby, pointed out the mutual relation of the several words in a sentence to one another, though the related words were disjoined, and placed in different parts of the sentence. This is an alteration in the structure of language, of which I shall have occasion to say more in the next Lecture. One obvious effect of it is, that we have now, for the most part, no way left us to shew the close relation of any two words to each other in meaning, but by placing them close to one another in the period. For instance, the Romans could, with propriety, express themselves thus :

Extinctum nymphæ crudeli funere Daphnim  
Flebant. \_\_\_\_\_

Because “*extinctum et Daphnim*,” being both in the accusative case, this showed, that the adjective and the substantive were related to each other, though placed at the two extremities of the line; and that both are governed by the active verb “*flebant*,” to which “*nymphæ*” plainly appeared to be the nominative. The different terminations here reduced all into order, and made the connection of the several words perfectly clear. But, let us translate these words literally into English, ac-

according to the Latin arrangement, “ Dead the  
“ nymphs by a cruel fate Daphnis lamented ;” and  
they become a perfect riddle, in which it is im-  
possible to find any meaning.

It was by means of this contrivance, which ob-  
tained in almost all the ancient languages, of va-  
rying the termination of the nouns and verbs, and  
thereby pointing out the concordance, and the  
government of the words, in a sentence, that they  
enjoyed so much liberty of transposition, and  
could marshal and arrange their words in any way  
that gratified the imagination, or pleased the ear.  
When language came to be modelled by the north-  
ern nations who overran the empire, they dropped  
the cases of nouns, and the different termination  
of verbs, with the more ease, because they placed  
no great value upon the advantages arising from  
such a structure of language. They were atten-  
tive only to clearness and copiousness of expres-  
sion. They neither regarded much the harmony  
of sound, nor sought to gratify the imagination by  
the collocation of words. They studied solely to  
express themselves in such a manner as should  
exhibit their ideas to others in the most distinct  
and intelligible order. And hence, if our language,  
by reason of the simple arrangement of its words,  
possesses less harmony, less beauty, and less force,  
than the Greek or Latin ; it is, however, in its  
meaning, more obvious and plain.



Thus I have shewn what the natural progress of language has been in several material articles ; and this account of the genius and progress of language lays a foundation for many observations, both curious and useful. From what has been said in this and the preceding Lecture, it appears that language was, at first, barren in words, but descriptive, by the sound of these words ; and expressive in the manner of uttering them, by the aid of significant tones and gestures : style was figurative and poetical : arrangement was fanciful and lively. It appears that, in all the successive changes which language has undergone, as the world advanced, the understanding has gained ground on the fancy and imagination. The progress of language in this respect, resembles the progress of age in man. The imagination is most vigorous and predominant in youth ; with advancing years, the imagination cools, and the understanding ripens. Thus language, proceeding from sterility to copiousness, hath, at the same time, proceeded from vivacity to accuracy ; from fire and enthusiasm to coolness and precision. Those characters of early language, descriptive sound, vehement tones and gestures, figurative style, and inverted arrangement, all hang together, have a mutual influence on each other ; and have all gradually given place to arbitrary sounds, calm pronunciation, simple style, plain arrangement. Language has become, in modern times, more correct, indeed, and accurate ; but, however, less striking



and animated : in its ancient state, more favourable to poetry and oratory ; in its present, to reason and philosophy.

Having finished my account of the progress of speech, I proceed to give an account of the progress of writing, which next demands our notice ; though it will not require so full a discussion as the former subject.

Next to speech, writing is, beyond doubt, the most useful art which men possess. It is plainly an improvement upon speech, and therefore must have been posterior to it in order of time. At first, men thought of nothing more than communicating their thoughts to one another, when present, by means of words, or sounds, which they uttered. Afterwards, they devised this further method of mutual communication with one another, when absent, by means of marks or characters presented to the eye, which we call writing.

Written characters are of two sorts. They are either signs for things, or signs for words. Of the former sort, signs of things, are the pictures, hieroglyphics, and symbols, employed by the ancient nations ; of the latter sort, signs for words, are the alphabetical characters now employed by all Europeans. These two kinds of writing are generically and essentially distinct.

Pictures were, undoubtedly, the first essay towards writing. Imitation is so natural to man, that, in all ages, and among all nations, some methods have obtained, of copying or tracing the likeness of sensible objects. Those methods would soon be employed by men for giving some imperfect information to others, at a distance, of what had happened; or for preserving the memory of facts which they sought to record. Thus, to signify that one man had killed another, they drew the figure of one man stretched upon the earth, and of another standing by him with a deadly weapon in his hand. We find, in fact, that when America was first discovered, this was the only sort of writing known in the kingdom of Mexico. By historical pictures, the Mexicans are said to have transmitted the memory of the most important transactions of their empire. These, however, must have been extremely imperfect records; and the nations who had no other, must have been very gross and rude. Pictures could do no more than delineate external events. They could neither exhibit the connections of them, nor describe such qualities as were not visible to the eye, nor convey any idea of the dispositions or words of men.

To supply, in some degree, this defect, there arose, in process of time, the invention of what are called hieroglyphical characters; which may be considered as the second stage of the art of writing. Hieroglyphics consist in certain sym-

bols, which are made to stand for invisible objects, on account of an analogy or resemblance which such symbols were supposed to bear to the objects. Thus, an eye was the hieroglyphical symbol of knowledge ; a circle, of eternity, which has neither beginning nor end. Hieroglyphics, therefore, were a more refined and extensive species of painting. Pictures delineated the resemblance of external visible objects ; hieroglyphics painted invisible objects, by analogies taken from the external world.

Among the Mexicans were found some traces of hieroglyphical characters, intermixed with their historical pictures. But Egypt was the country where this sort of writing was most studied and brought into a regular art. In hieroglyphics was conveyed all the boasted wisdom of their priests. According to the properties which they ascribed to animals, or the qualities with which they supposed natural objects to be endowed, they pitched upon them to be the emblems, or hieroglyphics, of moral objects ; and employed them in their writing for that end. Thus, ingratitude was denominated by a viper ; imprudence, by a fly ; wisdom, by an ant ; victory, by a hawk ; a dutiful child, by a stork ; a man universally shunned, by an eel, which they supposed to be found in company with no other fish. Sometimes they joined together two or more of these hieroglyphical characters ; as, a serpent with a hawk's head, to denote nature, with God presiding over it. But, as many of those

properties of objects, which they assumed for the foundation of their hieroglyphics, were merely imaginary, and the allusions drawn from them were forced and ambiguous; as the conjunction of their characters rendered them still more obscure, and must have expressed very indistinctly the connections and relations of things; this sort of writing could be no other than enigmatical and confused in the highest degree; and must have been a very imperfect vehicle of knowledge of any kind.

It has been imagined, that hieroglyphics were an invention of the Egyptian priests, for concealing their learning from common view; and that, upon this account, it was preferred by them to the alphabetical method of writing. But this is certainly a mistake. Hieroglyphics were, undoubtedly, employed, at first, from necessity, not from choice or refinement; and would never have been thought of, if alphabetical characters had been known. The nature of the invention plainly shews it to have been one of those gross and rude essays towards writing, which were adopted in the early ages of the world, in order to extend farther the first method which they had employed of simple pictures, or representations of visible objects. Indeed, in after times, when alphabetical writing was introduced into Egypt, and the hieroglyphical was, of course, fallen into disuse, it is known that the priests still employed the hieroglyphical characters, as a sacred kind of writing, now become peculiar to themselves, and serving to give an air

of mystery to their learning and religion. In this state, the Greeks found hieroglyphical writing, when they began to have intercourse with Egypt; and some of their writers mistook this use, to which they found it applied, for the cause that had given rise to the invention.

As writing advanced, from pictures of visible objects, to hieroglyphics, or symbols of things invisible; from these latter it advanced, among some nations, to simple arbitrary marks, which stood for objects, though without any resemblance or analogy to the object signified. Of this nature was the method of writing practised among the Peruvians. They made use of small cords, of different colours; and by knots upon these, of various sizes, and differently ranged, they contrived signs for giving information, and communicating their thoughts to one another.

Of this nature, also, are the written characters, which are used to this day throughout the great empire of China. The Chinese have no alphabet of letters, or simple sounds, which compose their words. But every single character which they use in writing, is significant of an idea; it is a mark which stands for some one thing or object. By consequence, the number of these characters must be immense. It must correspond to the whole number of objects or ideas which they have occasion to express; that is, to the whole number of words which they employ in speech:



may, it must be greater than the number of words ; one word, by varying the tone with which it is spoken, may be made to signify several different things. They are said to have seventy thousand of those written characters. To read and write them to perfection, is the study of a whole life ; which subjects learning, among them, to infinite disadvantage ; and must have greatly retarded the progress of all science.

Concerning the origin of these Chinese characters, there have been different opinions, and much controversy. According to the most probable accounts, the Chinese writing began, like the Egyptian, with pictures and hieroglyphical figures. These figures being, in progress, abbreviated in their form, for the sake of writing them easily, and greatly enlarged in their number, passed, at length, into those marks or characters which they now use, and which have spread themselves through several nations of the East. For we are informed, that the Japanese, the Tonquinese, and the Corœans, who speak different languages from one another, and from the inhabitants of China, use, however, the same written characters with them ; and, by this means, correspond intelligibly with each other in writing, though ignorant of the language spoken in their several countries ; a plain proof, that the Chinese characters are, like hieroglyphics, independent of language ; are signs of things, not of words.

We have one instance of this sort of writing in Europe. Our Cyphers, as they are called, or arithmetical figures, 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. which we have derived from the Arabians, are significant marks precisely of the same nature with the Chinese characters. They have no dependence on words; but each figure denotes an object; denotes the number for which it stands; and, accordingly, on being presented to the eye, is equally understood by all the nations who have agreed in the use of these cyphers; by Italians, Spaniards, French, and English, however different the languages of those nations are from one another, and whatever different names they give, in their respective languages, to each numerical cypher.

As far, then, as we have yet advanced, nothing has appeared which resembles our letters, or which can be called writing, in the sense we now give to that term. What we have hitherto seen, were all direct signs for things, and made no use of the medium of sound, or words; either signs by representation, as the Mexican pictures; or signs by analogy, as the Egyptian hieroglyphics; or signs by institution, as the Peruvian knots, the Chinese characters, and the Arabian cyphers.

At length, in different nations, men became sensible of the imperfection, the ambiguity, and the tediousness of each of these methods of communication with one another. They began to

consider, that by employing signs which should stand, not directly for things, but for the words which they used in speech for naming these things, a considerable advantage would be gained. For they reflected farther, that though the number of words in every language be, indeed, very great, yet the number of articulate sounds, which are used in composing these words, is comparatively small. The same simple sounds are continually recurring and repeated; and are combined together, in various ways, for forming all the variety of words which we utter. They bethought themselves, therefore, of inventing signs, not for each word by itself, but for each of those simple sounds which we employ in forming our words; and by joining together a few of those signs, they saw that it would be practicable to express, in writing, the whole combinations of sounds which our words require.

The first step, in this new progress, was the invention of an alphabet of syllables, which probably preceded the invention of an alphabet of letters, among some of the ancient nations; and which is said to be retained, to this day, in Æthiopia, and some countries of India. By fixing upon a particular mark, or character, for every syllable of the language, the number of characters necessary to be used in writing, was reduced within a much smaller compass than the number of words in the language. Still, however, the num-

ber of characters was great ; and must have continued to render both reading and writing very laborious arts. Till, at last, some happy genius arose ; and tracing the sounds made by the human voice, to their most simple elements, reduced them to a very few vowels and consonants ; and by affixing to each of these the signs which we now call letters, taught men how, by their combinations, to put in writing all the different words, or combinations of sound, which they employed in speech. By being reduced to this simplicity, the art of writing was brought to its highest state of perfection ; and, in this state, we now enjoy it in all the countries of Europe.

To whom we are indebted for this sublime and refined discovery, does not appear. Concealed by the darkness of remote antiquity, the great inventor is deprived of those honours which would still be paid to his memory, by all the lovers of knowledge and learning. It appears from the books which Moses has written, that among the Jews, and probably among the Egyptians, letters had been invented prior to his age. The universal tradition among the ancients is, that they were first imported into Greece by Cadmus the Phœnician ; who, according to the common system of chronology, was contemporary with Joshua ; according to Sir Isaac Newton's system, contemporary with King David. As the Phœnicians are not known to have been the inventors of any art or science,



though, by means of their extensive commerce, they propagated the discoveries made by other nations, the most probable and natural account of the origin of alphabetical characters is, that they took rise in Egypt, the first civilized kingdom of which we have any authentic accounts, and the great source of arts and polity among the ancients. In that country, the favourite study of hieroglyphical characters had directed much attention to the art of writing. Their hieroglyphics are known to have been intermixed with abbreviated symbols, and arbitrary marks; whence, at last, they caught the idea of contriving marks, not for things merely, but for sounds. Accordingly, Plato (in *Phædo*) expressly attributes the invention of letters to Theuth, the Egyptian, who is supposed to have been the *Hermes*, or *Mercury* of the Greeks. Cadmus himself, though he passed from Phœnicia to Greece, yet is affirmed, by several of the ancients, to have been originally of Thebes in Egypt. Most probably, Moses carried with him the Egyptian letters into the land of Canaan; and there being adopted by the Phœnicians, who inhabited part of that country, they were transmitted into Greece.

The alphabet which Cadmus brought into Greece was imperfect, and is said to have contained only sixteen letters. The rest were afterwards added, according as signs for proper sounds were found to be wanting. It is curious to observe,



that the letters which we use at this day, can be traced back to this very alphabet of Cadmus. The Roman alphabet, which obtains with us, and with most of the European nations, is plainly formed on the Greek, with a few variations. And all learned men observe, that the Greek characters, especially according to the manner in which they are formed in the oldest inscriptions, have a remarkable conformity with the Hebrew or Samaritan characters; which, it is agreed, are the same with the Phœnician, or the alphabet of Cadmus. Invert the Greek characters from left to right, according to the Phœnician and Hebrew manner of writing, and they are nearly the same. Besides the conformity of figure, the names or denominations of the letters, alpha, beta, gamma, &c. and the order in which the letters are arranged, in all the several alphabets, Phœnician, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, agrees so much, as amounts to a demonstration, that they were all derived originally from the same source. An invention so useful and simple was greedily received by mankind, and propagated with speed and facility through many different nations.

The letters were, originally, written from the right hand towards the left; that is, in a contrary order to what we now practise. This manner of writing obtained among the Assyrians, Phœnicians, Arabians, and Hebrews; and from some very old inscriptions, appears to have obtained

also among the Greeks. Afterwards, the Greeks adopted a new method, writing their lines alternately from the right to the left, and from the left to the right, which was called *Boustrophedon*; or, writing after the manner in which oxen plough the ground. Of this, several specimens still remain; particularly, the inscription on the famous Sigæan monument; and down to the days of Solon, the legislator of Athens, this continued to be the common method of writing. At length, the motion from the left hand to the right being found more natural and commodious, the practice of writing in this direction prevailed throughout all the countries of Europe.

Writing was long a kind of engraving. Pillars, and tables of stone, were first employed for this purpose, and afterwards, plates of the softer metals, such as lead. In proportion as writing became more common, lighter and more portable substances were employed. The leaves, and the bark of certain trees, were used in some countries; and in others, tablets of wood, covered with a thin coat of soft wax, on which the impression was made with a stylus of iron. In later times, the hides of animals, properly prepared, and polished into parchment, were the most common materials. Our present method of writing on paper, is an invention of no greater antiquity than the fourteenth century.

Thus I have given some account of the progress of these two great arts, speech and writing; by which men's thoughts are communicated, and the foundation laid for all knowledge and improvement. Let us conclude the subject, with comparing, in a few words, spoken language, and written language; or words uttered in our hearing, with words represented to the eye; where we shall find several advantages and disadvantages to be balanced on both sides.

The advantages of writing above speech are, that writing is both a more extensive, and a more permanent method of communication. More extensive; as it is not confined within the narrow circle of those who hear our words; but, by means of written characters, we can send out thoughts abroad, and propagate them through the world; we can lift our voice, so as to speak to the most distant regions of the earth. More permanent also, as it prolongs this voice to the most distant ages; it gives us the means of recording our sentiments of futurity, and of perpetuating the instructive memory of past transactions. It likewise affords this advantage to such as read, above such as hear, that, having the written characters before their eyes, they can arrest the sense of the writer. They can pause, and revolve, and compare at their leisure, one passage with another; whereas, the voice is fugitive and passing; you must catch the

words the moment they are uttered, or you lose them for ever.

But, although these be so great advantages of written language, that speech, without writing, would have been very inadequate for the instruction of mankind; yet we must not forget to observe, that spoken language has a great superiority over written language, in point of energy or force. The voice of the living speaker makes an impression on the mind, much stronger than can be made by the perusal of any writing. The tones of voice, the looks and gesture which accompany discourse, and which no writing can convey, render discourse, when it is well managed, infinitely more clear, and more expressive, than the most accurate writing. For tones, looks, and gestures, are natural interpreters of the sentiments of the mind. They remove ambiguities; they enforce impressions; they operate on us by means of sympathy, which is one of the most powerful instruments of persuasion. Our sympathy is always awakened more by hearing the speaker, than by reading his works in our closet. Hence, though writing may answer the purposes of mere instruction, yet all the great and high efforts of eloquence must be made by means of spoken, not of written language.

## LECTURE VIII.

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### STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE.

**A**FTER having given an account of the Rise and Progress of Language, I proceed to treat of its structure, or of general grammar. The structure of language is extremely artificial; and there are few sciences in which a deeper, or more refined logic is employed, than in grammar. It is apt to be slighted by superficial thinkers, as belonging to those rudiments of knowledge, which were inculcated upon us in our earliest youth. But what was then inculcated before we could comprehend its principles, would abundantly repay our study in maturer years; and to the ignorance of it must be attributed many of those fundamental defects which appear in writing.

Few authors have written with philosophical accuracy on the principles of general grammar; and, what is more to be regretted, fewer still have thought of applying those principles to the English language. While the French tongue has



long been an object of attention to many able and ingenious writers of that nation, who have considered its construction, and determined its propriety with great accuracy; the genius and grammar of the English, to the reproach of the country, have not been studied with equal care, or ascertained with the same precision. Attempts have been made, indeed, of late, towards supplying this defect; and some able writers have entered on the subject: but much remains yet to be done.

I do not propose to give any system, either of grammar in general, or of English grammar in particular. A minute discussion of the niceties of language would carry us too much off from other objects, which demand our attention in the course of Lectures. But I propose to give a general view of the chief principles relating to this subject, in observations on the several parts of which speech or language is composed; remarking, as I go along, the peculiarities of our own tongue. After which, I shall make some more particular remarks on the genius of the English language.

The first thing to be considered, is the division of the several parts of speech. The essential parts of speech are the same in all languages. There must always be some words which denote the names of objects, or mark the subject of discourse: other words, which denote the qualities of those objects, and express what we affirm concerning

them; and other words, which point out their connections and relations. Hence, substantives, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, must necessarily be found in all languages. The most simple and comprehensive division of the parts of speech is, into substantives, attributives, and connectives \*. Substantives are all the words which express the names of objects, or the subjects of discourse; attributives are all the words which express any attribute, property, or action of the former; connectives are what express the connections, relations, and dependencies which take place among them. The common grammatical division of speech into eight parts; nouns, pronouns, verbs, participles, adverbs, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions, is not very logical, as might be easily shewn; as it comprehends, under the general term of

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\* Quintilian informs us, that this was the most ancient division. " Tum videbit quot et quæ sunt partes orationis. Quamquam de numero parum convenit. Veteres enim, quorum fuerant Aristoteles atque Theodectes, verba modo, et nomina, et convinctiones tradiderunt. Videlicet, quod in verbis vim sermonis, in nominibus materiam (quia alterum est quod loquimur, alterum de quo loquimur), in convinctionibus autem complexum eorum esse judicârunt; quas conjunctiones a plerisque dici scio; sed hæc videtur ex *συνδεσµα* magi propria translatio. Paulatim a philosophicis, ac maximè a stoicis, auctus est numerus; ac primum convinctionibus articuli adjecti; post præpositiones; nominibus, appellatio, deinde pronomen; deinde mistum verbo participium; ipsis verbis, adverbia."

Lib. I. cap. i. v.

nouns, both substantives and adjectives, which are parts of speech generically and essentially distinct; while it makes a separate part of speech of participles, which are no other than verbal adjectives. However, as these are the terms to which our ears have been most familiarised, and as an exact logical division is of no great consequence to our present purpose, it will be better to make use of these known terms than of any other.

We are naturally led to begin with the consideration of substantive nouns, which are the foundation of all grammar, and may be considered as the most ancient part of speech. For, assuredly, as soon as men had got beyond simple interjections, or exclamations of passion, and began to communicate themselves by discourse, they would be under a necessity of assigning names to the objects they saw around them; which, in grammatical language, is called the invention of substantive nouns \*. And here, at our first setting

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\* I do not mean to assert, that among all nations, the first invented words were simple and regular substantive nouns. Nothing is more difficult than to ascertain the precise steps by which men proceeded in the formation of language. Names for objects must, doubtless, have risen in the most early stages of speech. But it is probable, as the learned author of the *Treatise on the Origin and Progress of Language* has shewn, (Vol. I. p. 371. 395.) that, among several savage tribes, some of the first articulate sounds that were formed, denoted a whole sentence rather

out, somewhat curious occurs. The individual projects which surround us are infinite in number. A savage, wherever he looked, beheld forests and trees. To give separate names to every one of those trees, would have been an endless and impracticable undertaking. His first object was, to give a name to that particular tree, whose fruit relieved his hunger, or whose shade protected him from the sun. But observing, that though other trees were distinguished from this by peculiar qualities of size or appearance, yet that they also

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than the name of a particular object ; conveying some information, or expressing some desires or fears, suited to the circumstances in which that tribe was placed, or relating to the business they had most frequent occasion to carry on ; as the lion is coming, the river is swelling, &c. Many of their first words, it is likewise probable, were not simple substantive nouns, but substantives, accompanied with some of those attributes in conjunction with which they were most frequently accustomed to behold them ; as, the great bear, the little hut, the wound made by the hatchet, &c. Of all which the author produces instances from several of the American languages ; and it is, undoubtedly, suitable to the natural course of the operations of the human mind thus to begin with particulars the most obvious to sense, and to proceed from these to more general expressions. He likewise observes, that the words of those primitive tongues are far from being, as we might suppose them, rude and short, and crowded with consonants ; but, on the contrary, are, for the most part, long words, and full of vowels. This is the consequence of their being formed upon the natural sounds which the voice utters with most ease, a little varied and distinguished by articulation ; and he shews this to hold, in fact, among most of the barbarous languages which are known.

agreed and resembled one another, in certain common qualities, such as springing from a root, and bearing branches and leaves, he formed in his mind some general idea of those common qualities, and ranging all that possessed them under one class of objects, he called that whole class, *a tree*. Longer experience taught them to subdivide this genus into the several species of oak, pine, ash, and the rest, according as his observation extended to the several qualities in which these trees agreed or differed.

But, still, he made use only of general terms in speech. For the oak, the pine, and the ash, were names of whole classes of objects; each of which included an immense number of undistinguished individuals. Here, then, it appears, that though the formation of abstract, or general conceptions, is supposed to be a difficult operation of the mind; such conceptions must have entered into the very first formation of language. For, if we except only the proper names of persons, such as Cæsar, John, Peter, all the other substantive nouns which we employ in discourse are the names, not of individual objects, but of very extensive genera, or species of objects; as, man, lion, house, river, &c. We are not, however, to imagine that this invention of general, or abstract terms, requires any great exertion of metaphysical capacity; for, by whatever steps the mind proceeds in it, it is certain that, when men have



once observed resemblances among objects, they are naturally inclined to call all those which assemble one another by one common name ; and of course to class them under one species. We may daily observe this practised by children in their first attempts towards acquiring language.

But now, after language had proceeded as far as I have described, the notification which it made of objects was still very imperfect : for, when one mentioned to another, in discourse, any substantive noun, such as, man, lion, or tree, how was it to be known which man, which lion, or which tree, he meant, among the many comprehended under one name ? Here occurs a very curious, and a very useful contrivance for specifying the individual object intended, by means of that part of speech called the article.

The force of the article consists, in pointing, or singling out from the common mass, the individual of which we mean to speak. In English, we have two articles, *a* and *the* ; *a* is more general and unlimited, *the* more definite and special. *A* is much the same with *one*, and marks only any one individual of a species : that individual being either unknown or left undetermined ; as, a lion, a king. *The*, which possesses more properly the force of the article, ascertains some known or determined individual of the species ; as, the lion, the king.

Articles are words of great use in speech. In some languages, however, they are not found. The Greeks have but one article, ὁ ἡ το, which answers to our definite or proper article, *the*. They have no word which answers to our article *a*; but they supply its place by the absence of their article. Thus, βασιλεὺς signifies *a* king; ὁ βασιλεὺς, *the* king. The Latins have no article. In the room of it they employ pronouns, as, hic, ille, iste, for pointing out the objects which they want to distinguish. “Noster sermo,” says Quintilian, “articulos non desiderat, ideoque in alias partes orationis sparguntur.” This, however, appears to me a defect in the Latin tongue; as articles contribute much to the clearness and precision of language.

In order to illustrate this, remark what difference there is in the meaning of the following expressions in English, depending wholly on the different employment of the articles; “The son of a king—The son of the king—A son of the king’s.” Each of these three phrases has an entirely different meaning, which I need not explain, because any one who understands the language conceives it clearly at first hearing, through the different application of the articles *a* and *the*. Whereas, in Latin, “Filius regis” is wholly undetermined; and to explain in which of these three senses it is to be understood, for it may bear any of them, a circumlocution of several words must

be used. In the same manner, "Are you *a* king? Are you *the* king?" are questions of quite separate import; which, however, are confounded together in the Latin phrase, "*esne tu rex?*" "*Thou art a man,*" is a very general and harmless position; but "*thou art the man,*" is an insertion capable, we know, of striking terror and remorse into the heart. These observations illustrate the force and importance of articles; and at the same time, I gladly lay hold of any opportunity of shewing the advantages of our own language.

Besides this quality of being particularized by the article, three affections belong to substantive nouns, number, gender, and case, which require our consideration.

Number distinguishes them as one, or many, of the same kind, called the singular and plural; a distinction found in all languages, and which must, indeed, have been coëval with the very infancy of language; as there were few things which men had more frequent occasion to express, than the difference between one and many. For the greater facility of expressing it, it has, in all languages, been marked by some variation made upon the substantive noun; as we see, in English, our plural is commonly formed by the addition of the letter S. In the Hebrew, Greek, and some other ancient languages, we find, not only a plural,

but a dual number ; the rise of which may very naturally be accounted for, from separate terms of numbering not being yet invented, and one, two, and many, being all, or at least the chief numeral distinctions which men, at first, had any occasion to take notice of.

Gender is an affection of substantive nouns, which will lead us into more discussion than number. Gender being founded on the distinction of the two sexes, it is plain, that in a proper sense, it can only find place in the names of living creatures, which admit the distinction of male and female ; and, therefore, can be ranged under the masculine or feminine genders. All other substantive nouns ought to belong to what grammarians call the neuter gender, which is meant to imply the negation of either sex. But, with respect to this distribution, somewhat singular hath obtained in the structure of language. For, in correspondence to that distinction of male and female sex, which runs through all the classes of animals, men have, in most languages, ranked a great number of inanimate objects, also, under the like distinctions of masculine and feminine. Thus we find it both in the Greek and Latin tongues. *Gladius*, a sword, for instance, is masculine ; *sagitta* an arrow, is feminine ; and this assignation of sex to inanimate objects, this distinction of them into masculine and feminine, appears often to be entirely capricious ; derived from no other princi-

ple than the casual structure of the language, which refers, to a certain gender, words of a certain termination. In the Greek and Latin, however, all inanimate objects are not distributed into masculine and feminine; but many of them are also classed, where all of them ought to have been, under the neuter gender; as, *templum*, a church; *sedile*, a seat.

But the genius of the French and Italian tongues differs, in this respect, from the Greek and Latin. In the French and Italian, from whatever cause it has happened, so it is, that the neuter gender is wholly unknown, and that all their names of inanimate objects are put upon the same footing with living creatures; and distributed, without exception, into masculine and feminine. The French have two articles, the masculine *le*, and the feminine *la*; and one or other of these is prefixed to all substantive nouns in the language, to denote their gender. The Italians make the same universal use of their articles *il* and *lo* for the masculine; and *la* for the feminine.

In the English language, it is remarkable that there obtains a peculiarity quite opposite. In the French and Italian there is no neuter gender. In the English, when we use common discourse, all substantive nouns, that are not names of living creatures, are neuter without exception. *He*, *she*, and *it*, are the marks of the three genders; and



we always use *it*, in speaking of any object where there is no sex, or where the sex is not known. The English is, perhaps, the only language in the known world (except the Chinese, which is said to agree with it in this particular) where the distinction of gender is properly and philosophically applied in the use of words, and confined, as it ought to be, to mark the real distinctions of male and female.

Hence arises a very great and signal advantage of the English tongue, which it is of consequence to remark \*. Though in common discourse, as I have already observed, we employ only the proper and literal distinction of sexes; yet the genius of the language permits us, whenever it will add beauty to our discourse, to make the names of inanimate objects masculine and feminine in a metaphorical sense; and when we do so, we are understood to quit the literal style, and to use one of the figures of discourse.

For instance; if I am speaking of virtue, in the course of ordinary conversation, or of strict reasoning, I refer the word to no sex or gender; I say, "Virtue is its own reward;" or, "it is the law of our nature." But if I choose to rise into

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\* The following observations on the metaphorical use of genders in the English language, are taken from Mr Harris's *Hermes*.

a higher tone ; if I seek to embellish and animate my discourse, I give a sex to virtue ; I say, “ She descends from heaven ; ” “ she alone confers true honour upon man ; ” “ her gifts are the only durable rewards.” By this means, we have it in our power to vary our style at pleasure. By making a very slight alteration, we can personify any object that we choose to introduce with dignity ; and by this change of manner, we give warning, that we are passing from the strict and logical to the ornamented and rhetorical style.

This is an advantage which not only every poet, but every good writer and speaker in prose, is, on many occasions, glad to lay hold of, and improve ; and it is an advantage peculiar to our tongue ; no other language possesses it. For, in other languages, every word has one fixed gender, masculine, feminine, or neuter, which can, upon no occasion, be changed ; *αἰσθη*, for instance, in Greek ; *virtus* in Latin, and *la vertu* in French, are uniformly feminine. *She* must always be the pronoun answering to the word, whether you be writing in poetry or in prose, whether you be using the style of reasoning, or that of declamation : whereas, in English, we can either express ourselves with the philosophical accuracy of giving no gender to things inanimate ; or, by giving them gender, and transforming them into persons, we adapt them to the style of poetry, and, when it is proper, we enliven prose.

It deserves to be further remarked on this subject, that, when we employ that liberty which our language allows, of ascribing sex to any inanimate object, we have not, however, the liberty of making it of what gender we please, masculine or feminine; but are, in general, subjected to some rule of gender which the currency of language has fixed to that object. The foundation of that rule is imagined, by Mr Harris, in his "Philosophical Enquiry into the Principles of Grammar," to be laid in a certain distant resemblance or analogy to the natural distinction of the two sexes.

Thus, according to him, we commonly give the masculine gender to those substantive nouns used figuratively, which are conspicuous for the attributes of imparting, or communicating; which are by nature strong and efficacious, either to good or evil; or which have a claim to some eminence, whether laudable or not. Those, again, he imagines to be generally made feminine, which are conspicuous for the attributes of containing, and of bringing forth; which have more of the passive in their nature than of the active; which are peculiarly beautiful or amiable; or which have respect to such excesses as are rather feminine than masculine. Upon these principles he takes notice, that the sun is always put in the masculine gender with us; the moon in the feminine, as being the receptacle of the sun's light. The earth is,

universally, feminine. A ship, a country, a city, are likewise made feminine, as receivers or containers. God, in all languages, is masculine. Time, we make masculine, on account of its mighty efficacy ; virtue, feminine, from its beauty, and its being the object of love. Fortune is always feminine. Mr Harris imagines, that the reasons which determine the gender of such capital words as these, hold in most other languages as well as the English. This, however, appears doubtful. A variety of circumstances, which seemed casual to us, because we cannot reduce them to principles, must, unquestionably, have influenced the original formation of languages ; and in no article whatever does language appear to have been more capricious, and to have proceeded less according to fixed rule, than in the imposition of gender upon things inanimate ; especially among such nations as have applied the distinction of masculine and feminine to all substantive nouns.

Having discussed gender, I proceed, next, to another remarkable peculiarity of substantive nouns, which, in the style of grammar, is called their declension by cases. Let us, first, consider what cases signify. In order to understand this, it is necessary to observe, that, after men had given names to external objects, had particularised them by means of the article, and distinguished them by number and gender, still their language remained extremely imperfect, till they had devised some

method of expressing the relations which those objects bore, one towards another. They would find it of little use to have a name for man, lion, tree, river, without being able, at the same time, to signify how these stood with respect to each other ; whether, as approaching to, receding from, joined with, and the like. Indeed, the relations which objects bear to one another are immensely numerous : and therefore, to devise names for them all, must have been among the last and most difficult refinements of language. But, in its most early periods, it was absolutely necessary to express, in some way or other, such relations as were most important, and as occurred most frequently in common speech. Hence the genitive, dative, and ablative cases of nouns, which express the noun itself together with those relations, *of, to, from, with, and by* ; the relations which we have the most frequent occasion to mention. The proper idea, then, of cases in declension, is no other than an expression of the state, or relation, which one object bears to another, denoted by some variation made upon the name of that object ; most commonly in the final letters, and, by some languages, in the initial.

All languages, however, do not agree in this mode of expression. The Greek, Latin, and several other languages, use declension. The English, French, and Italian, do not ; or, at most, use it very imperfectly. In place of the variations



of cases, the modern tongues express the relations of objects, by means of the words called prepositions, which denote those relations, prefixed to the name of the object. English nouns have no case whatever, except a sort of genitive, commonly formed by the addition of the letter *s* to the noun; as when we say, “Dryden’s Poems,” meaning the Poems of Dryden. Our personal pronouns have also a case, which answers to the accusative of the Latin, *I, me,—he, him,—who, whom*. There is nothing, then, or, at least, very little, in the grammar of our language, which corresponds to declension in the ancient languages.

Two questions, respecting this subject, may be put. First, Which of these methods of expressing relations, whether that by declension, or that by prepositions was the most ancient usage in language? And next, Which of them has the best effect? Both methods, it is plain, are the same as to the sense, and differ only in form. For the significancy of the Roman language would not have been altered, though the nouns, like ours, had been without cases, provided they had employed prepositions; and though, to express a disciple of Plato, they had said, “Discipulus de Plato,” like the modern Italians, in place of “Discipulus Platonis.”

Now, with respect to the antiquity of cases, although they may, on first view, seem to constitute

a more artificial method than the other, of denoting relations, yet there are strong reasons for thinking that this was the earliest method practised by men. We find, in fact, that declensions and cases are used in most of what are called the mother tongues, or original languages, as well as in the Greek and Latin. And a very natural and satisfying account can be given why this usage should have early obtained. Relations are the most abstract and metaphysical ideas of any which men have occasion to form, when they are considered by themselves, and separated from the related object. It would puzzle any man, as has been well observed by an author on this subject, to give a distinct account of what is meant by such a word as *of*, or *from*, when it stands by itself, and to explain all that may be included under it. The first rude inventors of language, therefore, would not, for a long while, arrive at such general terms. In place of considering any relation in the abstract, and devising a name for it, they would much more easily conceive it in conjunction with a particular object; and they would express their conceptions of it, by varying the name of that object through all the different cases : *hominis*, of a man ; *homini*, to a man ; *homine*, with a man, &c.

But, though this method of declension was, probably, the only method which men employed at first for denoting relations, yet, in progress of time, many other relations being observed, besides

those which are signified by the cases of nouns, and men also becoming more capable of general and metaphysical ideas, separate names were gradually invented for all the relations which occurred, forming that part of speech which we now call prepositions. Prepositions being once introduced, they were found to be capable of supplying the place of cases, by being prefixed to the nominative of the noun. Hence it came to pass, that, as nations were intermixed by migrations and conquests, and were obliged to learn and adopt the languages of one another, prepositions supplanted the use of cases and declensions. When the Italian tongue, for instance, sprung out of the Roman, it was found more easy and simple, by the Gothic nations, to accommodate a few prepositions to the nominative of every noun, and to say, *di Roma, al Roma, di Carthago, al Carthago*, than to remember all the variety of terminations, *Romæ, Romam, Carthaginis, Carthaginem*, which the use of declensions required in the ancient nouns. By this progress we can give a natural account how nouns, in our modern tongues, come to be so void of declension: a progress which is fully illustrated in Dr Adam Smith's ingenious Dissertation on the Formation of Languages.

With regard to the other question on this subject, Which of these two methods is of the greater utility and beauty? we shall find advantages and disadvantages to be balanced on both sides. There

is no doubt that, by abolishing cases, we have rendered the structure of modern languages more simple. We have disembarrassed it of all the intricacy which arose from the different forms of declension, of which the Romans had no fewer than five; and from all the irregularities in these several declensions. We have thereby rendered our languages more easy to be acquired, and less subject to the perplexity of rules. But, though the simplicity and ease of language be great and estimable advantages, yet there are also such disadvantages attending the modern method, as leave the balance, on the whole, doubtful, or rather incline it to the side of antiquity.

For, in the first place, by our constant use of prepositions for expressing the relations of things, we have filled language with a multitude of those little words which are eternally occurring in every sentence, and may be thought thereby to have encumbered speech, by an addition of terms; and by rendering it more prolix, to have enervated its force. In the second place, we have certainly rendered the sound of language less agreeable to the ear, by depriving it of that variety and sweetness which arose from the length of words, and the change of terminations, occasioned by the cases in the Greek and Latin. But, in the third place, the most material disadvantage is, that, by this abolition of cases, and by a similar alteration, of which I am to speak in the next Lecture, in the

conjugation of verbs, we have deprived ourselves of that liberty of transposition in the arrangement of words, which the ancient languages enjoyed.

In the ancient tongues, as I formerly observed, the different terminations, produced by declension and conjugation, pointed out the reference of the several words of a sentence to one another, without the aid of juxtaposition; suffered them to be placed, without ambiguity, in whatever order was most suited to give force to the meaning, or harmony to the sound. But now, having none of those marks of relation incorporated with the words themselves, we have no other way left us of shewing what words in a sentence are most closely connected in meaning, than that of placing them close by one another in the period. The meaning of the sentence is brought out in separate members and portions; it is broken down and divided. Whereas the structure of the Greek and Roman sentences, by the government of their nouns and verbs, presented the meaning so interwoven and compounded in all its parts, as to make us perceive it in one united view. The closing words of the period ascertained the relation of each member to another; and all that ought to be connected in our idea, appeared connected in the expression. Hence, more brevity, more vivacity, more force. That luggage of particles (as an ingenious author happily expresses it), which we



are obliged always to carry along with us, both clogs style, and enfeebles sentiment \*.

Pronouns are the class of words most nearly related to substantive nouns; being, as the name imports, representatives, or substitutes, of nouns. *I, thou, he, she, and it*, are no other than an abridged way of naming the persons, or objects, with which we have immediate intercourse, or to which we are obliged frequently to refer in discourse. Accordingly, they are subject to the same

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\* “ The various terminations of the same word, whether  
“ verb or noun, are always conceived to be more intimately con-  
“ nected with the term which they serve to lengthen, than the  
“ additional detached, and in themselves insignificant particles,  
“ which we are obliged to employ as connectives to our signifi-  
“ cant words. Our method gives almost the same exposure to  
“ the one as to the other, making the significant parts, and the  
“ insignificant, equally conspicuous; theirs much oftener sinks,  
“ as it were, the former into the latter, at once preserving their  
“ use, and hiding their weakness. Our modern languages may,  
“ in this respect, be compared to the art of the carpenter in its  
“ rudest state; when the union of the materials employed by  
“ the artisan, could be effected only by the help of those exter-  
“ nal and coarse implements, pins, nails, and cramps. The an-  
“ cient languages resemble the same art in its most improved  
“ state, after the invention of dovetail joints, grooves, and mortice-  
“ ces; when thus all the principal junctions are effected, by  
“ forming, properly, the extremities or terminations of the pieces  
“ to be joined. For, by means of these, the union of the parts  
“ is rendered closer; while that by which that union is produced  
“ is scarcely perceivable.” The Philosophy of Rhetoric, by Dr  
Campbell, Vol. II. p. 412.

modifications with substantive nouns, of number, gender, and case. Only, with respect to gender, we may observe, that the pronouns of the first and second person, as they are called, *I* and *thou*, do not appear to have had the distinctions of gender given them in any language; for this plain reason, that as they always refer to persons who are present to each other when they speak, their sex must appear, and therefore needs not be marked by a masculine or feminine pronoun. But, as the third person may be absent, or unknown, the distinction of gender there becomes necessary; and accordingly, in English, it hath all the three genders belonging to it; *he, she, it*. As to cases, even those languages which have dropped them in substantive nouns, sometimes retain more of them in pronouns, for the sake of the greater readiness in expressing relations; as pronouns are words of such frequent occurrence in discourse. In English, most of our grammarians hold the personal pronouns to have two cases, besides the nominative; a genitive, and an accusative. *I, mine, me*;—*thou, thine, thee*;—*he, his, him*;—*who, whose, whom*.

In the first stage of speech, it is probable that the places of those pronouns were supplied by pointing to the object when present, and naming it when absent. For one can hardly think that pronouns were of early invention; as they are words of such a particular and artificial nature. *I, thou,*

*he, it*, it is to be observed, are not names peculiar to any single object, but so very general, that they may be applied to all persons, or objects, whatever, in certain circumstances. *It* is the most general term that can possibly be conceived, as it may stand for any one thing in the universe of which we speak. At the same time, these pronouns have this quality, that, in the circumstances in which they are applied, they never denote more than one precise individual; which they ascertain, and specify, much in the same manner as is done by the article. So that pronouns are, at once, the most general and the most particular words in language. They are commonly the most irregular and troublesome words to the learner, in the grammar of all tongues; as being the words most in common use, and subjected thereby to the greatest varieties.

Adjectives, or terms of quality, such as *great, little, black, white, yours, ours*, are the plainest and simplest of all that class of words which are termed attributive. They are found in all languages; and, in all languages, must have been very early invented; as objects could not be distinguished from one another, nor any intercourse be carried on concerning them, till once names were given to their different qualities.

I have nothing to observe in relation to them, except that singularity which attends them in the

Greek and Latin, of having the same form given them with substantive nouns; being declined, like them, by cases, and subjected to the like distinctions of number and gender. Hence it has happened, that grammarians have made them belong to the same part of speech, and divided the noun into substantive and adjective; an arrangement founded more on attention to the external form of words, than to their nature and force. For adjectives, or terms of quality, have not, by their nature, the least resemblance to substantive nouns, as they never express any thing which can possibly subsist by itself; which is the very essence of the substantive noun. They are, indeed, more akin to verbs, which, like them, express the attribute of some substance.

It may, at first view, appear somewhat odd and fantastic, that adjectives should, in the ancient languages, have assumed so much the form of substantives; since neither number, nor gender, nor cases, nor relations, have any thing to do, in a proper sense, with mere qualities, such as, *good* or *great*, *soft* or *hard*. And yet *bonus* and *magnus*, and *tener*, have their singular and plural, their masculine and feminine, their genitives and datives, like any of the names of substances, or persons. But this can be accounted for, from the genius of these tongues. They avoided, as much as possible, considering qualities separately, or in the abstract. They made them a part, or appendage of the sub-

stance which they served to distinguish; they made the adjective depend on its substantive, and resemble it in termination, in number, and gender, in order that the two might coalesce the more intimately, and be joined in the form of expression, as they were in the nature of things. The liberty of transposition, too, which those languages indulged, required such a method as this to be followed. For, allowing the related words of a sentence to be placed at a distance from each other, it required the relation of adjectives to their proper substantives to be pointed out, by such similar circumstances of form and termination, as, according to the grammatical style, should shew their concordance. When I say, in English, the “beautiful wife of a brave man,” the juxtaposition of the words prevents all ambiguity. But when I say, in Latin, “*formosa fortis viri uxor*,” it is only the agreement, in gender, number, and case, of the adjective “*formosa*,” which is the first word of the sentence, with the substantive “*uxor*,” which is the last word, that declares the meaning.



## LECTURE IX.

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### STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE.—ENGLISH TONGUE.

**O**F the whole class of words that are called attributive, indeed, of all the parts of speech, the most complex, by far, is the verb. It is chiefly in this part of speech, that the subtle and profound metaphysic of language appears; and, therefore, in examining the nature and different variations of the verb, there might be room for ample discussion. But as I am sensible that such grammatical discussions, when they are pursued far, become intricate and obscure, I shall avoid dwelling any longer on this subject than seems absolutely necessary.

The verb is so far of the same nature with the adjective, that it expresses, like it, an attribute, or property, of some person or thing. But it does more than this. For, in all verbs, in every language, there are no less than three things implied at once; the attribute of some substantive, an affirmation concerning that attribute, and time.

Thus, when I say, "the sun shineth;" shining is the attribute ascribed to the sun; the present time is marked; and an affirmation is included, that this property of shining belongs, at that time, to the sun. The participle "shining," is merely an adjective, which denotes an attribute, or property, and also expresses time; but carries no affirmation. The infinitive mood, "to shine," may be called the name of the verb; it carries neither time nor affirmation, but simply expresses that attribute, action, or state of things, which is to be the subject of the other moods and tenses. Hence the infinitive often carries the resemblance of a substantive noun; and both in English and Latin, is sometimes constructed as such. As, "scire tuum nihil est." "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori." And, in English, in the same manner: "To write well is difficult; to speak eloquently is still more difficult." But as, through all the other tenses and moods, the affirmation runs, and is essential to them; "the sun shineth, was shining, shone, will shine, would have shone," &c. the affirmation seems to be that which chiefly distinguishes the verb from the other parts of speech, and gives it its most conspicuous power. Hence there can be no sentence, or complete proposition, without a verb either expressed or implied. For, whenever we speak, we always mean to assert, that something is, or is not; and the word which carries this assertion, or affirmation, is a verb. From this

sort of eminence belonging to it, this part of speech hath received its name, verb, from the Latin *verbum*, or the *word*, by way of distinction.

Verbs, therefore, from their importance and necessity in speech, must have been coeval with men's first attempts towards the formation of language: Though, indeed, it must have been the work of long time, to rear them up to that accurate and complex structure which they now possess. It seems very probable, as Dr Smith has suggested, that the radical verb, or the first form of it, in most languages, would be, what we now call, the impersonal verb. "It rains; it thunders; "it is light; it is agreeable;" and the like; as this is the very simplest form of the verb, and merely affirms the existence of an event, or of a state of things. By degrees, after pronouns were invented, such verbs became personal, and were branched out into all the variety of tenses and moods.

The tenses of the verb are contrived to imply the several distinctions of time. Of these I must take some notice, in order to shew the admirable accuracy with which language is constructed. We think commonly of no more than the three great divisions of time, into the past, the present, and the future; and we might imagine, that if verbs had been so contrived, as simply to express these, no more was needful. But language proceeds with much greater subtilty. It splits time

into its several moments. It considers time as never standing still, but always flowing; things past, as more or less perfectly completed; and things future, as more or less remote, by different gradations. Hence the great variety of tenses in most tongues.

The present may, indeed, be always considered as one indivisible point, susceptible of no variety. "I write, or I am writing; *scribo*." But it is not so with the past. There is no language so poor, but it hath two or three tenses to express the varieties of it. Ours hath no fewer than four. 1. A past action may be considered as left unfinished; which makes the imperfect tense, "I was writing; *scribebam*." 2. As just now finished. This makes the proper perfect tense, which, in English, is always expressed by the help of the auxiliary verb, "I have written." 3. It may be considered as finished some time ago; the particular time left indefinite. "I wrote; *scripsi*;" which may either signify, "I wrote yesterday, or I wrote a twelvemonth ago." This is what grammarians call a *aorist*, or indefinite past. 4. It may be considered as finished before something else, which is also past. This is the *plusquamperfect*. "I had written, *scripseram*. I had written before "I received his letter."

Here we observe, with some pleasure, that we have an advantage over the Latins, who have only

three varieties upon the past time. They have no proper perfect tense, or one which distinguishes an action just now finished, from an action that was finished some time ago. In both these cases they must say, "*scripsi*." Though there be a manifest difference in the tenses, which our language expresses by this variation, "I have written," meaning, I have just now finished writing; and, "I wrote," meaning at some former time, since which other things have intervened. This difference the Romans have no tense to express; and therefore can only do it by a circumlocution.

The chief varieties in the future time are two; a simple or indefinite future; "I shall write; "*scribam*;" and a future, relating to something else, which is also future. "I shall have written; "*scripsero*." I shall have written before he arrives\*.

Besides tenses, or the power of expressing time, verbs admit the distinction of voices, as they are called, the active and the passive; according as the affirmation respects something that is done, or something that is suffered; "I love, or I am "loved." They admit also the distinction of

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\* On the tenses of verbs, Mr Harris's *Hermes* may be consulted by such as desire to see them scrutinized with metaphysical accuracy; and also, the *Treatise on the Origin and Progress of Language*, Vol. II. p. 125.



moods, which are designed to express the affirmation, whether active or passive, under different forms. The indicative mood, for instance, simply declares a proposition, "I write; I have written;" the imperative requires, commands, threatens, "Write thou; let him write." The subjunctive expresses the proposition under the form of a condition, or in subordination to some other thing, to which a reference is made, "I might write, I could write, I should write, if the case were so and so." This manner of expressing an affirmation, under so many different forms, together also with the distinction of the three persons, *I*, *thou*, and *he*, constitutes what is called the conjugation of verbs, which makes so great a part of the grammar of all languages.

It now clearly appears, as I before observed, that, of all the parts of speech, verbs are, by far, the most artificial and complex. Consider only, how many things are denoted by this single Latin word, "*amavissem*, I would have loved." First, The person who speaks, "I." Secondly, An attribute, or action of that person, "loving." Thirdly, An affirmation concerning that action. Fourthly, The past time denoted in that affirmation, "have loved." And, fifthly, A condition, on which the action is suspended, "would have loved." It appears curious and remarkable, that words of this complex import, and with more or less of this artificial structure, are to be

found, as far as we know, in all languages of the world.

Indeed, the form of conjugation, or the manner of expressing all these varieties in the verb, differs greatly in different tongues. Conjugation is esteemed most perfect in those languages which, by varying either the termination or the initial syllable of the verb, express the greatest number of important circumstances, without the help of auxiliary words. In the original tongues, the verbs are said to have few tenses, or expressions of time; but then their moods are so contrived, as to express a great variety of circumstances and relations. In the Hebrew, for instance, they say in one word, without the help of any auxiliary, not only, "I have taught," but, "I have taught exactly, or often; I have been commanded to teach; I have taught myself." The Greek, which is the most perfect of all the known tongues, is very regular and complete in all the tenses and moods. The Latin is formed on the same model, but more imperfect, especially in the passive voice, which forms most of the tenses by the help of the auxiliary "*sum*."

In all the modern European tongues, conjugation is very defective. They admit few varieties in the termination of the verb itself; but have almost constant recourse to their auxiliary verbs, throughout all the moods and tenses, both active

and passive. Language has undergone a change in conjugation, perfectly similar to that which I shewed, in the last Lecture, it underwent with respect to declension. As prepositions, prefixed to the noun, superseded the use of cases; so the two great auxiliary verbs, *to have*, and *to be*, with those other auxiliaries, which we use in English, *do*, *shall*, *will*, *may*, and *can*, prefixed to the participle, supersede, in a great measure, the different terminations of moods and tenses, which formed the ancient conjugations.

The alteration, in both cases, was owing to the same cause, and will be easily understood, from reflecting on what was formerly observed. The auxiliary verbs are like prepositions, words of a very general and abstract nature. They imply the different modifications of simple existence, considered alone, and without reference to any particular thing. In the early state of speech, the import of them would be incorporated with every particular verb in its tenses and moods, long before words were invented for denoting such abstract conceptions of existence, alone, and by themselves. But after those auxiliary verbs came, in the progress of language, to be invented and known, and to have tenses and moods given to them like other verbs; it was found, that as they carried in their nature the force of that affirmation which distinguishes the verb, they might, by being joined with the participle which gives the meaning of the

verb, supply the place of most of the moods and tenses. Hence, as the modern tongues began to rise out of the ruins of the ancient, this method established itself in the new formation of speech. Such words, for instance, as *am, was, have, shall*, being once familiar, it appeared more easy to apply these to any verb whatever; as, *I am loved; I was loved; I have loved*; than to remember that variety of terminations which were requisite in conjugating the ancient verbs, *amor, amabar, amavi*, &c. Two or three varieties only, in the termination of the verb, were retained, as, *love, loved, loving*; and all the rest were dropt. The consequence, however, of this practice was the same as that of abolishing declensions. It rendered language more simple and easy in its structure; but withal more prolix, and less graceful. This finishes all that seemed most necessary to be observed with respect to verbs.

The remaining parts of speech, which are called the indeclinable parts, or that admit of no variations, will not detain us long.

Adverbs are the first that occur. These form a very numerous class of words in every language, reducible, in general, to the head of attributives; as they serve to modify, or to denote some circumstance of an action, or of a quality, relative to its time, place, order, degree, and the other properties of it, which we have occasion to specify.

They are, for the most part, no more than an abridged mode of speech, expressing by one word, what might, by a circumlocution, be resolved into two or more words belonging to the other parts of speech. "Exceedingly," for instance, is the same as, "in a high degree;" "bravely," the same as, "with bravery or valour;" "here," the same as, "in this place;" "often and seldom," the same as, "for many, and for few times:" and so of the rest. Hence, adverbs may be conceived as of less necessity, and of later introduction into the system of speech, than many other classes of words; and, accordingly, the great body of them are derived from other words formerly established in the language.

Prepositions and conjunctions are words more essential to discourse than the greatest part of adverbs. They form that class of words called connectives, without which there could be no language; serving to express the relations which things bear to one another, their mutual influence, dependencies, and coherence; thereby joining words together into intelligible and significant propositions. Conjunctions are generally employed for connecting sentences, or members of sentences; as, *and*, *because*, *although*, and the like. Prepositions are employed for connecting words, by shewing the relation which one substantive noun bears to another; as, *of*, *from*, *to*, *above*, *below*, &c. Of the force of these I had occasion to



speaking before, when treating of the cases and declensions of substantive nouns.

It is abundantly evident, that all these connective particles must be of the greatest use in speech; seeing they point out the relations and transitions by which the mind passes from one idea to another. They are the foundation of all reasoning, which is no other thing than the connection of thoughts. And, therefore, though among barbarous nations, and in the rude uncivilized ages of the world, the stock of these words might be small, it must always have increased, as mankind advanced in the arts of reasoning and reflection. The more that any nation is improved by science, and the more perfect their language becomes, we may naturally expect, that it will abound more with connective particles; expressing relations of things, and transitions of thought, which had escaped a grosser view. Accordingly, no tongue is so full of them as the Greek, in consequence of the acute and subtle genius of that refined people. In every language, much of the beauty and strength of it depends on the proper use of conjunctions, prepositions, and those relative pronouns, which also serve the same purpose of connecting the different parts of discourse. It is the right or wrong management of these, which chiefly makes discourse appear firm and compacted, or disjointed and loose; which carries it on in its progress with a smooth and even pace, or renders its march irregular and desultory.

I shall dwell no longer on the general construction of language. Allow me, only, before I dismiss the subject, to observe, that dry and intricate as it may seem to some, it is, however, of great importance, and very nearly connected with the philosophy of the human mind. For, if speech be the vehicle or interpreter of the conceptions of our minds, an examination of its structure and progress cannot but unfold many things concerning the nature and progress of our conceptions themselves, and the operations of our faculties; a subject that is always instructive to man. "Ne quis," says Quintilian, an author of excellent judgment, "*nequis tanquam parva fastidiat grammatices elementa. Non quia magnæ sit operæ consonantes a vocalibus discernere, easque in semivocalium numerum, mutarumque partiri, sed quia interiora velut sacri hujus adeuntibus, apparebit multa rerum subtilitas, quæ non modo acuere ingenia puerilia, sed exercere altissimam quoque eruditionem ac scientiam possit* \*." i. 4.

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\* "Let no man despise, as inconsiderable, the elements of grammar, because it may seem to him a matter of small consequence, to shew the distinction between vowels and consonants, and to divide the latter into liquids and mutes. But they who penetrate into the innermost parts of this temple of science, will there discover such refinement and subtilty of matter, as is not only proper to sharpen the understandings of young men, but sufficient to give exercise for the most profound knowledge and erudition."

Let us now come nearer to our own language. In this, and the preceding Lecture, some observations have already been made on its structure. But it is proper that we should be a little more particular in the examination of it.

The language, which is, at present, spoken throughout Great Britain, is neither the ancient primitive speech of the island, nor derived from it; but is altogether of foreign origin. The language of the first inhabitants of our island, beyond doubt, was the Celtic, or Gaelic, common to them with Gaul; from which country, it appears, by many circumstances, that Great Britain was peopled. This Celtic tongue, which is said to be very expressive and copious, and is, probably, one of the most ancient languages in the world, obtained once in most of the western regions of Europe. It was the language of Gaul, of Great Britain, of Ireland, and very probably, of Spain also; till, in the course of those revolutions which, by means of the conquests, first, of the Romans, and afterwards, of the northern nations, changed the government, speech, and, in a manner, the whole face of Europe, this tongue was gradually obliterated; and now subsists only in the mountains of Wales, in the Highlands of Scotland, and among the wild Irish. For the Irish, the Welsh, and the Erse, are no other than different dialects of the same tongue, the ancient Celtic.

This, then, was the language of the primitive Britons, the first inhabitants that we know of in our island; and continued so till the arrival of the Saxons in England, in the year of our Lord 450; who, having conquered the Britons, did not intermix with them, but expelled them from their habitations, and drove them, together with their language, into the mountains of Wales. The Saxons were one of those northern nations that overran Europe; and their tongue, a dialect of the Gothic or Teutonic, altogether distinct from the Celtic, laid the foundation of the present English tongue. With some intermixture of Danish, a language, probably, from the same root with the Saxon, it continued to be spoken throughout the southern part of the island, till the time of William the Conqueror. He introduced his Norman, or French, as the language of the court, which made a considerable change in the speech of the nation; and the English which was spoken afterwards, and continues to be spoken now, is a mixture of the ancient Saxon, and this Norman French, together with such new and foreign words as commerce and learning have, in progress of time, gradually introduced.

The history of the English language, can, in this manner, be clearly traced. The language spoken in the Low Countries of Scotland, is now, and has been for many centuries, no other than a dialect of the English. How, indeed, or by what



steps, the ancient Celtic tongue came to be banished from the Low Country in Scotland, and to make its retreat into the Highlands and islands, cannot be so well pointed out as how the like revolution was brought about in England. Whether the southermost part of Scotland was once subject to the Saxons, and formed a part of the kingdom of Northumberland; or, whether the great number of English exiles that retreated into Scotland, upon the Norman conquest, and upon other occasions, introduced into that country their own language, which afterwards, by the mutual intercourse of the two nations, prevailed over the Celtic, are uncertain and contested points, the discussion of which would lead us too far from our subject.

From what has been said, it appears, that the Teutonic dialect is the basis of our present speech. It has been imported among us in three different forms, the Saxon, the Danish, and the Norman; all which have mingled together in our language. A very great number of our words, too, are plainly derived from the Latin. These we had not directly from the Latin, but most of them, it is probable, entered into our tongue, through the channel of that Norman French, which William the Conqueror introduced. For, as the Romans had long been in full possession of Gaul, the language spoken in that country, when it was invaded by the Franks and Normans, was a sort of corrupted



Latin, mingled with Celtic, to which was given the name of Romanshe: and as the Franks and Normans did not, like the Saxons in England, expel the inhabitants, but, after their victories, mingled with them, the language of the country became a compound of the Teutonic dialect imported by these conquerors, and of the former corrupted Latin. Hence, the French language has always continued to have a very considerable affinity with the Latin; and hence, a great number of words of Latin origin, which were in use among the Normans in France, were introduced into our tongue at the conquest, to which, indeed, many have since been added, directly from the Latin, in consequence of the great diffusion of Roman literature throughout all Europe.

From the influx of so many streams, from the junction of so many dissimilar parts, it naturally follows, that the English, like every compounded language, must needs be somewhat irregular. We cannot expect from it that correspondence of parts, that complete analogy in structure, which may be found in those simpler languages, which have been formed in a manner within themselves, and built on one foundation. Hence, as I before shewed, it has but small remains of conjugation or declension; and its syntax is narrow, as there are few marks in the words themselves that can shew their relation to each other, or, in the grammatical style, point out either their concordance, or their

government, in the sentence. Our words having been brought to us from several different regions, straggle, if we may so speak, asunder from each other; and do not coalesce so naturally in the structure of a sentence, as the words in the Greek and Roman tongues.

But these disadvantages, if they be such, of a compound language, are balanced by other advantages that attend it; particularly, by the number and variety of words with which such a language is likely to be enriched. Few languages are, in fact, more copious than the English. In all grave subjects especially, historical, critical, political, and moral, no writer has the least reason to complain of the barrenness of our tongue. The studious reflecting genius of the people, has brought together great store of expressions, on such subjects, from every quarter. We are rich too in the language of poetry. Our poetical style differs widely from prose, not in point of numbers only, but in the very words themselves; which shews what a stock and compass of words we have it in our power to select and employ, suited to those different occasions. Herein we are infinitely superior to the French, whose poetical language, if it were not distinguished by rhyme, would not be known to differ from their ordinary prose.

It is chiefly, indeed, on grave subjects, and with respect to the stronger emotions of the mind, that

our language displays its power of expression. We are said to have thirty words, at least, for denoting all the varieties of the passion of anger \*. But, in describing the more delicate sentiments and emotions, our tongue is not so fertile. It must be confessed, that the French language far surpasses ours, in expressing the nicer shades of character ; especially those varieties of manner, temper, and behaviour, which are displayed in our social intercourse with one another. Let any one attempt to translate into English, only a few pages of one of Marivaux's novels, and he will soon be sensible of our deficiency of expression on these subjects. Indeed, no language is so copious as the French for whatever is delicate, gay, and amusing. It is, perhaps, the happiest language for conversation in the known world ; but, on the higher subjects of composition, the English may be justly esteemed to excel it considerably.

Language is generally understood to receive its predominant tincture from the national character of the people who speak it. We must not, indeed, expect that it will carry an exact and full

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\* Anger, wrath, passion, rage, fury, outrage, fierceness, sharpness, animosity, choler, resentment, heat, heartburning ; to fume, storm, inflame, be incensed ; to vex, kindle, irritate, enrage, exasperate, provoke, fret ; to be sullen, hasty, hot, rough, sour, peevish, &c.

impression of their genius and manners; for, among all nations, the original stock of words which they received from their ancestors, remain as the foundation of their speech throughout many ages, while their manners undergo, perhaps, very great alterations. National character will, however, always have some perceptible influence on the turn of language; and the gaiety and vivacity of the French, and the gravity and thoughtfulness of the English, are sufficiently impressed on their respective tongues.

From the genius of our language, and the character of those who speak it, it may be expected to have strength and energy. It is, indeed, naturally prolix; owing to the great number of particles and auxiliary verbs which we are obliged constantly to employ; and this prolixity must, in some degree, enfeeble it. We seldom can express so much by one word as was done by the verbs, and by the nouns, in the Greek and Roman languages. Our style is less compact; our conceptions being spread out among more words, and split, as it were, into more parts, make a fainter impression when we utter them. Notwithstanding this defect, by our abounding in terms for expressing all the strong emotions of the mind, and by the liberty which we enjoy, in a greater degree than most nations, of compounding words, our language may be esteemed to possess considerable force of expression; comparatively, at least, with



the other modern tongues, though much below the ancient. The style of Milton, alone, both in poetry and prose, is a sufficient proof, that the English tongue is far from being destitute of nerves and energy.

The flexibility of a language, or its power of accommodation to different styles and manners, so as to be either grave and strong, or easy and flowing, or tender and gentle, or pompous and magnificent, as occasions require, or as an author's genius prompts, is a quality of great importance in speaking and writing. It seems to depend upon three things; the copiousness of a language; the different arrangements of which its words are susceptible; and the variety and beauty of the sound of those words, so as to correspond to many different subjects. Never did any tongue possess this quality so eminently as the Greek, which every writer of genius could so mould, as to make the style perfectly expressive of his own manner and peculiar turn. It had all the three requisites, which I have mentioned as necessary for this purpose. It joined to these the graceful variety of its different dialects; and thereby readily assumed every sort of character which an author could wish, from the most simple and most familiar, up to the most majestic. The Latin, though a very beautiful language, is inferior, in this respect, to the Greek. It has more of a fixed character of stateliness and gravity. It is



always firm and masculine in the tenour of its sound; and is supported by a certain senatorial dignity, of which it is difficult for a writer to divest it wholly, on any occasion. Among the modern tongues, the Italian possesses a great deal more of this flexibility than the French. By its copiousness, its freedom of arrangement, and the great beauty and harmony of its sounds, it suits itself very happily to most subjects, either in prose or in poetry; is capable of the august and the strong, as well as the tender; and seems to be, on the whole, the most perfect of all the modern dialects which have arisen out of the ruins of the ancient. Our own language, though not equal to the Italian in flexibility, yet is not destitute of a considerable degree of this quality. If any one will consider the diversity of style which appears in some of our classics, that great difference of manner, for instance, which is marked by the style of Lord Shaftsbury, and that of Dean Swift, he will see, in our tongue, such a circle of expression, such a power of accommodation to the different taste of writers, as redounds not a little to its honour.

What the English has been most taxed with is its deficiency in harmony of sound. But though every native is apt to be partial to the sounds of his own language, and may, therefore, be suspected of not being a fair judge in this point; yet I imagine, there are evident grounds on which it may be shewn, that this charge against our tongue has

been carried too far. The melody of our versification, its power of supporting poetical numbers, without any assistance from rhyme, is alone a sufficient proof that our language is far from being unmusical. Our verse is, after the Italian, the most diversified and harmonious of any of the modern dialects; unquestionably far beyond the French verse, in variety, sweetness, and melody. Mr Sheridan has shewn, in his Lectures, that we abound more in vowel and diphthong sounds than most languages; and these, too, so divided into long and short, as to afford a proper diversity in the quantity of our syllables. Our consonants, he observes, which appear so crowded to the eye on paper, often form combinations not disagreeable to the ear in pronouncing; and, in particular, the objection which has been made to the frequent recurrence of the hissing consonant *s* in our language, is unjust and ill-founded. For, it has not been attended to, that very commonly, and in the final syllables especially, this letter loses altogether the hissing sound, and is transformed into a *z*, which is one of the sounds on which the ear rests with pleasure; as in *has, these, those, loves, hears*, and innumerable more, where, though the letter *s* be retained in writing, it has really the power of *z*, not of the common *s*.

After all, however, it must be admitted, that smoothness, or beauty of sound, is not one of the distinguishing properties of the English tongue.

Though not incapable of being formed into melodious arrangements, yet strength and expressiveness, more than grace, form its character. We incline, in general, to a short pronunciation of our words, and have shortened the quantity of most of those which we borrow from the Latin, as *orator*, *spectacle*, *theatre*, *liberty*, and such like. Agreeable to this, is a remarkable peculiarity of English pronunciation, the throwing the accent farther back, that is, nearer the beginning of the word, than is done by any other nation. In Greek and Latin, no word is accented farther back than the third syllable from the end, or what is called the antepenult. But, in English, we have many words accented on the fourth, some on the fifth syllable from the end, as *mémorable*, *convéniency*, *ámbulatory*, *prófitableness*. The general effect of this practice of hastening the accent, or placing it so near the beginning of the word, is to give a brisk and a spirited, but at the same time a rapid and hurried, and not very musical, tone to the whole pronunciation of a people.

The English tongue possesses, undoubtedly, this property, that it is the most simple in its form and construction, of all the European dialects. It is free from all intricacy of cases, declensions, moods, and tenses. Its words are subject to fewer variations from their original form, than those of any other language. Its substantives have no distinction of gender, except what nature has made,

and but one variation in case. Its adjectives admit of no change at all except what expresses the degree of comparison. Its verbs, instead of running through all the varieties of ancient conjugation, suffer no more than four or five changes in termination. By the help of a few prepositions and auxiliary verbs, all the purposes of significancy in meaning are accomplished; while the words, for the most part, preserve their form unchanged. The disadvantages in point of elegance, brevity, and force, which follow from this structure of our language, I have before pointed out. But, at the same time, it must be admitted, that such a structure contributes to facility. It renders the acquisition of our language less laborious, the arrangement of our words more plain and obvious, the rules of our syntax fewer and more simple.

I agree, indeed, with Dr. Lowth, (Preface to his Grammar), in thinking that the simplicity and facility of our language occasion its being frequently written and spoken with less accuracy. It was necessary to study languages which were of a more complex, and artificial form, with greater care. The marks of gender and case, the varieties of conjugation and declension, the multiplied rules of syntax, were all to be attended to in speech. Hence language became more an object of art. It was reduced into form; a standard was established; and any departures from the standard became conspicuous. Whereas, among us,



language is hardly considered as an object of grammatical rule. We take it for granted, that a competent skill in it may be acquired without any study; and that in a syntax so narrow and confined as ours, there is nothing which demands attention. Hence arises the habit of writing in a loose and inaccurate manner.

I admit, that no grammatical rules have sufficient authority to controul the firm and established usage of language. Established custom in speaking and writing, is the standard to which we must at last resort for determining every controverted point in language and style. But it will not follow, from this, that grammatical rules are superseded as useless. In every language, which has been in any degree cultivated, there prevails a certain structure and analogy of parts, which is understood to give foundation to the most reputable usage of speech; and which, in all cases, when usage is loose or dubious, possesses considerable authority. In every language, there are rules of syntax which must be inviolably observed by all who would either write or speak with any propriety. For syntax is no other than that arrangement of words in a sentence, which renders the meaning of each word, and the relation of all the words to one another, most clear and intelligible.

All the rules of Latin syntax, it is true, cannot be applied to our language. Many of these rules



arose from the particular form of their language, which occasioned verbs or prepositions to govern, some the genitive, some the dative, some the accusative or ablative case. But, abstracting from these peculiarities, it is to be always remembered, that the chief and fundamental rules of syntax are common to the English as well as the Latin tongue; and, indeed, belong equally to all languages. For, in all languages, the parts which compose speech are essentially the same; substantives, adjectives, verbs, and connecting particles: And wherever these parts of speech are found, there are certain necessary relations among them, which regulate their syntax, or the place which they ought to possess in a sentence. Thus, in English, just as much as in Latin, the adjective must, by position, be made to agree with its substantive; and the verb must agree with its nominative in person and number; because, from the nature of things, a word, which expresses either a quality or an action, must correspond as closely as possible with the name of that thing whose quality, or whose action it expresses. Two or more substantives, joined by a copulative, must always require the verbs or pronouns, to which they refer, to be placed in the plural number; otherwise their common relation to these verbs or pronouns is not pointed out. An active verb must, in every language, govern the accusative; that is, clearly point out some substantive noun, as the object to which its action is directed. A relative pronoun must

in every form of speech, agree with its antecedent in gender, number, and person; and conjunctions, or connecting particles, ought always to couple like cases and moods; that is, ought to join together words which are of the same form and state with each other. I mention these, as a few exemplifications of that fundamental regard to syntax, which, even in such a language as ours, is absolutely requisite for writing or speaking with any propriety.

Whatever the advantage or defects of the English language be, as it is our own language, it deserves a higher degree of our study and attention, both with regard to the choice of words which we employ, and with regard to the syntax, or the arrangement of these words in a sentence. We know how much the Greeks and the Romans, in their most polished and flourishing times, cultivated their own tongues. We know how much study both the French and the Italians have bestowed upon theirs. Whatever knowledge may be acquired by the study of other languages, it can never be communicated with advantage, unless by such as can write and speak their own language well. Let the matter of an author be ever so good and useful, his compositions will always suffer in the public esteem, if his expression be deficient in purity and propriety. At the same time, the attainment of a correct and elegant style is an object which demands application and labour. If any

imagine they can catch it merely by the ear, or acquire it by a slight perusal of some of our good authors, they will find themselves much disappointed. The many errors, even in point of grammar, the many offences against purity of language, which are committed by writers who are far from being contemptible, demonstrate, that a careful study of the language is previously requisite, in all who aim at writing it properly \*.

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\* On this subject, the reader ought to peruse Dr Lowth's Short Introduction to English Grammar, with Critical Notes, which is the grammatical performance of highest authority that has appeared in our time, and in which he will see what I have said concerning the inaccuracies in language of some of our best writers, fully verified. In Dr Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, he will likewise find many acute and ingenious observations, both on the English language, and on style in general. And Dr Priestly's Rudiments of English Grammar will also be useful, by pointing out several of the errors into which writers are apt to fall.

## LECTURE X.

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### STYLE.—PERSPICUITY AND PRECISION.

**H**AVING finished the subject of Language, I now enter on the consideration of style, and the rules that relate to it.

It is not easy to give a precise idea of what is meant by style. The best definition I can give of it is, the peculiar manner in which a man expresses his conceptions, by means of language. It is different from mere language or words. The words which an author employs may be proper and faultless; and his style may, nevertheless, have great faults: it may be dry, or stiff, or feeble, or affected. Style has always some reference to an author's manner of thinking. It is a picture of the ideas which rise in his mind; and of the manner in which they rise there; and hence, when we are examining an author's composition, it is, in many cases, extremely difficult to separate the style from the sentiment. No wonder these two

should be so intimately connected, as style is nothing else, than that sort of expression which our thoughts most readily assume. Hence, different countries have been noted for peculiarities of style, suited to their different temper and genius. The eastern nations animated their style with the most strong and hyperbolical figures. The Athenians, a polished and acute people, formed a style accurate, clear, and neat. The Asiatics, gay and loose in their manners, affected a style florid and diffuse. The like sort of characteristical differences are commonly remarked in the style of the French, the English, and the Spaniards. In giving the general characters of style, it is usual to talk of a nervous, a feeble, or a spirited style; which are plainly the characters of a writer's manner of thinking, as well as of expressing himself: so difficult it is to separate these two things from one another. Of the general characters of style, I am afterwards to discourse; but it will be necessary to begin with examining the more simple qualities of it; from the assemblage of which, its more complex denominations, in a great measure, result.

All the qualities of a good style may be ranged under two heads, perspicuity and ornament. For all that can possibly be required of language, is, to convey our ideas clearly to the minds of others, and, at the same time, in such a dress, as by pleasing and interesting them, shall most effectually strengthen the impressions which we seek



to make. When both those ends are answered, we certainly accomplish every purpose for which we use writing and discourse.

Perspicuity, it will be readily admitted, is the fundamental quality of style\*; a quality so essential in every kind of writing, that, for the want of it, nothing can atone. Without this, the richest ornaments of style only glimmer through the dark; and puzzle instead of pleasing the reader. This, therefore, must be our first object, to make our meaning clearly and fully understood, and understood without the least difficulty “*Oratio*,” says Quinctilian, “*debet negligenter quoque audientibus esse aperta: ut in animum audientis, sicut sol in oculos, etiamsi in eum non intendatur occurrat. Quare, non solum ut intelligere possit, sed ne omnino possit non intelligere curandum†.*” If we are obliged to follow a writer with much care, to pause and to read over his sentences a second time, in order to comprehend

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\* “*Nobis prima sit virtus, perspicuitas, propria verba, rectus ordo, non in longum dilata conclusio; nihil neque desit, neque superfluat.*”

QUINCTIL. lib. viii.

† “*Discourse ought always to be obvious, even to the most careless and negligent hearer; so that the sense shall strike his mind, as the light of the sun does our eyes, though they are not directed upwards to it. We must study, not only that every hearer may understand us, but that it shall be impossible for him not to understand us.*”

them fully, he will never please us long. Mankind are too idolent to relish so much labour. They may pretend to admire the author's depth, after they have discovered his meaning; but they will seldom be inclined to take up his work a second time.

Authors sometimes plead the difficulty of their subject as an excuse for the want of perspicuity. But this excuse can rarely, if ever, be admitted. For whatever a man conceives clearly, that it is in his power, if he will be at the trouble, to put into distinct propositions, or to express clearly to others; and upon no subject ought any man to write, where he cannot think clearly. His ideas, indeed, may, very excusably, be on some subjects incomplete or inadequate; but still, as far as they go, they ought to be clear; and wherever this is the case, perspicuity in expressing them is always attainable. The obscurity which reigns so much among many metaphysical writers, is, for the most part, owing to the indistinctness of their own conceptions. They see the object but in a confused light; and, of course, can never exhibit it in a clear one to others.

Perspicuity in writing, is not to be considered as merely a sort of negative virtue, or freedom from defect. It has higher merit: it is a degree of positive beauty. We are pleased with an author, we consider him as deserving praise, who,

frees us from all fatigue of searching for his meaning; who carries us through his subject without any embarrassment or confusion; whose style flows always like a limpid stream, where we see to the very bottom.

The study of perspicuity requires attention, first, to single words and phrases, and then to the construction of sentences. I begin with treating of the first, and shall confine myself to it in this Lecture.

Perspicuity, considered with respect to words and phrases, requires these three qualities in them *purity, propriety, and precision.*

Purity and propriety of language are often used indiscriminately for each other; and, indeed, they are very nearly allied. A distinction, however, obtains between them. Purity is the use of such words, and such constructions, as belong to the idiom of the language which we speak; in opposition to words and phrases that are imported from other languages, or that are obsolete, or new-coined, or used without proper authority. Propriety is the selection of such words in the language, as the best and most established usage has appropriated to those ideas which we intend to express by them. It implies the correct and happy application of them, according to that usage, in opposition to vulgarisms, or low expres-

sions ; and to words and phrases, which would be less significant of the ideas that we mean to convey. Style may be pure, that is, it may all be strictly English, without Scotticisms or Gallicisms, or ungrammatical irregular expressions of any kind, and may, nevertheless, be deficient in propriety. The words may be ill chosen ; not adapted to the subject, nor fully expressive of the author's sense. He has taken all his words and phrases from the general mass of English language ; but he has made his selection among these words unhappily. Whereas, style cannot be proper without being also pure ; and where both purity and propriety meet, besides making style perspicuous, they also render it graceful. There is no standard, either of purity or of propriety, but the practice of the best writers and speakers in the country.

When I mentioned obsolete or new-coined words as incongruous with purity of style, it will be easily understood, that some exceptions are to be made. On certain occasions, they may have grace. Poetry admits of greater latitude than prose, with respect to coining, or, at least, new-compounding words ; yet, even here, this liberty should be used with a sparing hand. In prose, such innovations are more hazardous, and have a worse effect. They are apt to give style an affected and conceited air ; and should never be ventured upon, except by such, whose established reputation gives them some degree of dictatorial power over language.

The introduction of foreign and learned words, unless where necessity requires them, should always be avoided. Barren languages may need such assistances; but ours is not one of these. Dean Swift, one of our most correct writers, valued himself much on using no words but such as were of native growth; and his language may, indeed, be considered as a standard of the strictest purity and propriety in the use of words. At present, we seem to be departing from this standard. A multitude of Latin words have, of late, been poured in upon us. On some occasions, they give an appearance of elevation and dignity to style. But often also they render it stiff and forced: And, in general, a plain native style, as it is more intelligible to all readers, so, by a proper management of words, it may be made equally strong and expressive with this Latinised English.

Let us now consider the import of precision in language, which, as it is the highest part of the quality denoted by perspicuity, merits a full explication; and the more, because distinct ideas are, perhaps, not commonly formed about it.

The exact import of precision may be drawn from the etymology of the word. It comes from "*præcidere*," to cut off: It imports retrenching all superfluities, and pruning the expression so, as to exhibit neither more nor less than an exact copy of his idea who uses it. I observed before,



that it is often difficult to separate the qualities of style from the qualities of thought; and it is found so in this instance; for, in order to write with precision, though this be properly a quality of style, one must possess a very considerable degree of distinctness and accuracy in his manner of thinking.

The words which a man uses to express his ideas, may be faulty in three respects: they may either not express that idea which the author intends, but some other which only resembles, or is akin to it; or, they may express that idea, but not quite fully and completely; or, they may express it, together with something more than he intends. Precision stands opposed to all these three faults; but chiefly to the last. In an author's writing with propriety, his being free from the two former faults seems implied. The words which he uses are proper; that is, they express that idea which he intends, and they express it fully; but to be precise, signifies, that they express that idea, and no more. There is nothing in his words which introduces any foreign idea, any superfluous unseasonable accessory, so as to mix it confusedly with the principal object, and thereby to render our conception of that object loose and indistinct. This requires a writer to have, himself, a very clear apprehension of the object he means to present to us; to have laid fast hold of it in his mind; and never to waver in any

one view he takes of it : a perfection to which, indeed, few writers attain.

The use and importance of precision may be deduced from the nature of the human mind. It never can view, clearly and distinctly, above one object at a time. If it must look at two or three together, especially objects among which there is resemblance or connection, it finds itself confused and embarrassed. It cannot clearly perceive in what they agree, and in what they differ. Thus, were any object, suppose some animal, to be presented to me, of whose structure I wanted to form a distinct notion, I would desire all its trappings to be taken off, I would require it to be brought before me by itself, and to stand alone, that there might be nothing to distract my attention. The same is the case with words. If, when you would inform me of your meaning, you also tell me more than what conveys it ; if you join foreign circumstances to the principal object ; if, by unnecessarily varying the expression, you shift the point of view, and make me see sometimes the object itself, and sometimes another thing that is connected with it ; you thereby oblige me to look on several objects at once, and I lose sight of the principal. You load the animal you are shewing me, with so many trappings and collars, and bring so many of the same species before me, somewhat resembling, and yet somewhat differing, that I see none of them clearly.

This forms what is called a loose style ; and is the proper opposite to precision. It generally arises from using a superfluity of words. Feeble writers employ a multitude of words to make themselves understood, as they think, more distinctly ; and they only confound the reader. They are sensible of not having caught the precise expression to convey what they would signify ; they do not, indeed, conceive their own meaning very precisely themselves ; and, therefore, help it out, as they can, by this and the other word, which may, as they suppose, supply the defect, and bring you somewhat nearer to their idea ; they are always going about it and about it, but never just hit the thing. The image, as they set it before you, is always seen double ; and no double image is distinct. When an author tells me of his hero's *courage* in the day of battle, the expression is precise, and I understand it fully. But if, from the desire of multiplying words, he will needs praise his *courage* and *fortitude* ; at the moment he joins these words together, my idea begins to waver. He means to express one quality more strongly ; but he is, in truth, expressing two. *Courage* resists danger ; *fortitude* supports pain. The occasion of exerting each of these qualities is different ; and being led to think of both together, when only one of them should be in my view, my view is rendered unsteady, and my conception of the objects indistinct.

From what I have said, it appears that an author may, in a qualified sense, be perspicuous, while yet he is far from being precise. He uses proper words, and proper arrangement; he gives you the idea as clear as he conceives it himself; and so far he is perspicuous; but the ideas are not very clear in his own mind; they are loose and general; and, therefore, cannot be expressed with precision. All subjects do not equally require precision. It is sufficient, on many occasions, that we have a general view of the meaning. The subject, perhaps, is of the known and familiar kind; and we are in no hazard of mistaking the sense of the author, though every word which he uses be not precise and exact.

Few authors, for instance, in the English language, are more clear and perspicuous, on the whole, than Archbishop Tillotson, and Sir William Temple; yet neither of them are remarkable for precision. They are loose and diffuse; and accustomed to express their meaning by several words, which shew you fully whereabouts it lies, rather than to single out those expressions which would convey clearly the idea they have in view, and no more. Neither, indeed, is precision the prevailing character of Mr Addison's style; although he is not so deficient in this respect as the other two authors.

Lord Shaftesbury's faults, in point of precision, are much greater than Mr Addison's; and

the more unpardonable, because he is a professed philosophical writer; who, as such, ought, above all things, to have studied precision. His style has both great beauties, and great faults; and, on the whole, is by no means a safe model for imitation. Lord Shaftesbury was well acquainted with the power of words: those which he employs are generally proper and well-sounding; he has great variety of them; and his arrangement, as shall be afterwards shewn, is commonly beautiful. His defect, in precision, is not owing so much to indistinct or confused ideas, as to perpetual affectation. He is fond to excess, of the pomp and parade of language; he is never satisfied with expressing any thing clearly and simply; he must always give it the dress of state and majesty. Hence perpetual circumlocutions, and many words and phrases employed to describe somewhat, that would have been described much better by one of them. If he has occasion to mention any person or author, he very rarely mentions him by his proper name. In the treatise, entitled, *Advice to an Author*, he descants for two or three pages together upon Aristotle, without once naming him in any other way than the master critic, the mighty genius and judge of art, the prince of critics, the grand master of art, and consummate philologist. In the same way, the grand poetic sire, the philosophical patriarch, and his disciple of noble birth and lofty genius, are the only names by which he condescends to distinguish Homer, So-



crates, and Plato, in another passage of the same treatise. This method of distinguishing persons is extremely affected ; but it is not so contrary to precision, as the frequent circumlocutions he employs for all moral ideas ; attentive, on every occasion, more to the pomp of language, than to the clearness which he ought to have studied as a philosopher. The moral sense, for instance, after he had once defined it, was a clear term ; but how vague becomes the idea, when, in the next page, he calls it, “ That natural affection, and anticipating fancy, which makes the sense of right and wrong ?” Self-examination, or reflection on our own conduct, is an idea conceived with ease ; but when it is wrought into all the forms of “ A man’s dividing himself into two parties, becoming a self-dialogist, entering into partnership with himself, forming the dual number practically within himself ;” we hardly know what to make of it. On some occasions, he so adorns, or rather loads with words, the plainest and simplest propositions, as, if not to obscure, at least to enfeeble them.

In the following paragraph, for example, of the inquiry concerning virtue, he means to shew, that, by every ill action we hurt our mind, as much as one who should swallow poison, or give himself a wound, would hurt his body. Observe what a redundancy of words he pours forth : “ Now, if “ the fabric of the mind or temper appeared to us,

“ such as it really is ; if we saw it impossible to  
“ remove hence any one good or orderly affection,  
“ or to introduce any ill or disorderly one, with-  
“ out drawing on, in some degree, that dissolute  
“ state which, at its height, is confessed to be so  
“ miserable : it would then, undoubtedly, be con-  
“ fessed, that since no ill, immoral, or unjust ac-  
“ tion can be committed, without either a new in-  
“ road and breach on the temper and passions, or  
“ a further advancing of that execution already  
“ done ; whoever did ill, or acted in prejudice to  
“ his integrity, good nature, or worth, would, of  
“ necessity, act with greater cruelty towards him-  
“ self, than he who scrupled not to swallow what  
“ was poisonous, or who, with his own hands,  
“ should voluntarily mangle or wound his out-  
“ ward form or constitution, natural limbs or bo-  
“ dy \*.” Here, to commit a bad action, is, first,  
“ To remove a good and orderly affection, and to  
“ introduce an ill or disorderly one ;” next, it is,  
“ To commit an action that is ill, immoral, and  
“ unjust ;” and in the next line, it is, “ To do ill,  
“ or to act in prejudice of integrity, good nature,  
“ and worth ;” nay, so very simple a thing as a  
man’s wounding himself is, “ To mangle, or wound,  
“ his outward form or constitution, his natural  
“ limbs or body.” Such superfluity of words is  
disgustful to every reader of correct taste ; and  
serves no purpose but to embarrass and perplex

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\* Characterist. Vol. II. p. 85.

the sense. This sort of style is elegantly described by Quintilian, “ Est in quibusdam turba in-  
 “ nium verborum, qui dum communem loquendi  
 “ morem reformidant, ducti specie nitoris, circum-  
 “ eunt omnia copiosa loquacitate quæ dicere  
 “ volunt \*.” Lib. vii. cap. 2.

The great source of a loose style, in opposition to precision, is the injudicious use of those words termed synonymous. They are called synonymous, because they agree in expressing one principal idea ; but, for the most part, if not always, they express it with some diversity in the circumstances. They are varied by some accessory idea, which every word introduces, and which forms the distinction between them. Hardly, in any language, are there two words that convey precisely the same idea ; a person thoroughly conversant in the propriety of the language, will always be able to observe something that distinguishes them. As they are like different shades of the same colour, an accurate writer can employ them to great advantage, by using them so as to heighten and to finish the picture which he gives us. He supplies by one, what was wanting in the other, to the

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\* “ A crowd of unmeaning words is brought together by some  
 “ authors, who, afraid of expressing themselves after a common  
 “ and ordinary manner, and allured by an appearance of splen-  
 “ dour, surround every thing which they mean to say with a  
 “ certain copious loquacity.”

force, or to the lustre of the image which he means to exhibit. But in order to this end, he must be extremely attentive to the choice which he makes of them. For the bulk of writers are very apt to confound them with each other; and to employ them carelessly, merely for the sake of filling up a period, or of rounding and diversifying the language, as if their signification were exactly the same, while, in truth, it is not. Hence a certain mist, and indistinctness, is unwarily thrown over style.

In the Latin language, there are no two words we should more readily take to be synonymous, than *amare* and *diligere*. Cicero, however, has shewn us, that there is a very clear distinction betwixt them. “Quid ergo,” says he, in one of his epistles, “tibi commendem eum quem tu ipse diligis? Sed tamen ut scires eum non a me *diligere* solum, verum etiam *amari*, ob eam rem tibi hæc scribo\*.” In the same manner *tutus* and *securus* are words which we should readily confound; yet their meaning is different. *Tutus* signifies out of danger; *securus*, free from the dread of it. Seneca has elegantly marked this distinction; “Tuta scelera esse possunt, secura non possunt†.” In our own language, very many instances might be given of a difference in meaning

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\* Ad. Famil. l. 13. Ep. 47.

† Epis. 97.

among words reputed synonymous ; and, as the subject is of importance, I shall now point out some of these. The instances which I am to give, may themselves be of use ; and they will serve to shew the necessity of attending, with care and strictness, to the exact import of words, if ever we would write with propriety or precision.

*Austerity, severity, rigour.* Austerity relates to the manner of living ; severity, of thinking ; rigour, of punishing. To austerity, is opposed effeminacy ; to severity, relaxation ; to rigour, clemency. A hermit is austere in his life ; a casuist, severe in his application of religion or law ; a judge, rigorous in his sentences.

*Custom, habit.* Custom respects the action ; habit, the actor. By custom, we mean the frequent repetition of the same act ; by habit, the effect which that repetition produces on the mind or body. By the custom of walking often in the streets, one acquires a habit of idleness.

*Surprised, astonished, amazed, confounded.* I am surprised, with what is new or unexpected ; I am astonished, at what is vast or great ; I am amazed, with what is incomprehensible ; I am confounded, by what is shocking or terrible.

*Desist, renounce, quit, leave off.* Each of these words implies some pursuit or object relinquished ;



but from different motives. We desist, from the difficulty of accomplishing. We renounce, on account of the disagreeableness of the object, or pursuit. We quit, for the sake of some other thing which interests us more; and we leave off, because we are weary of the design. A politician desists from his designs, when he finds they are impracticable; he renounces the court, because he has been affronted by it; he quits ambition for study or retirement; and leaves off his attendance on the great, as he becomes old and weary of it.

*Pride, vanity.* Pride makes us esteem ourselves; vanity makes us desire the esteem of others. It is just to say, as Dean Swift has done, that a man is too proud to be vain.

*Haughtiness, disdain.* Haughtiness is founded on the high opinion we entertain of ourselves; disdain, on the low opinion we have of others.

*To distinguish, to separate.* We distinguish, what we want not to confound with another thing; we separate what we want to remove from it. Objects are distinguished from one another, by their qualities. They are separated, by the distance of time or place.

*To weary, to fatigue.* The continuance of the same thing wearies us; labour fatigues us. I am weary with standing; I am fatigued with walking.

A suitor wearies us by his perseverance ; fatigues us by his importunity.

*To abhor, to detest.* To abhor, imports, simply, strong dislike ; to detest, imports also strong disapprobation. One abhors being in debt ; he detests treachery.

*To invent, to discover.* We invent things that are new ; we discover what was before hidden. Galileo invented the telescope ; Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood.

*Only, alone.* Only, imports that there is no other of the same kind ; alone, imports being accompanied by no other. An only child is one who has neither brother nor sister ; a child alone, is one who is left by itself. There is a difference, therefore, in precise language, betwixt these two phrases, " Virtue only makes us happy," and, " Virtue alone makes us happy." Virtue only makes us happy, imports, that nothing else can do it. Virtue alone makes us happy, imports, that virtue, by itself, or unaccompanied with other advantages, is sufficient to do it.

*Entire, complete.* A thing is entire, by wanting none of its parts ; complete, by wanting none of the appendages that belong to it. A man may have an entire house to himself ; and yet not have one complete apartment.

*Tranquillity, Peace, Calm.* Tranquillity respects a situation free from trouble, considered in itself; peace the same situation with respect to any causes that might interrupt it; calm, with regard to a disturbed situation going before or following it. A good man enjoys tranquillity in himself, peace with others and calm after the storm.

*A difficulty, an obstacle.* A difficulty embarrasses; an obstacle stops us. We remove the one; we surmount the other. Generally, the first expresses somewhat arising from the nature and circumstances of the affair; the second somewhat arising from a foreign cause. Philip found difficulty in managing the Athenians, from the nature of their dispositions; but the eloquence of Demosthenes was the greatest obstacle to his design.

*Wisdom, prudence.* Wisdom leads us to speak and act what is most proper. Prudence prevents our speaking and acting improperly. A wise man employs the most proper means for success; a prudent man, the safest means for not being brought into danger.

*Enough, sufficient.* Enough relates to the quantity which one wishes to have of any thing. Sufficient relates to the use that is to be made of it. Hence, enough generally imports a greater

quantity than sufficient does. The covetous man never has enough, although he has what is sufficient for nature.

*To avow, to acknowledge, to confess.* Each of these words imports the affirmation of a fact, but in very different circumstances. To avow, supposes the person to glory in it; to acknowledge, supposes a small degree of faultiness, which the acknowledgment compensates; to confess, supposes a higher degree of crime. A patriot avows his opposition to a bad minister, and is applauded; a gentleman acknowledges his mistake, and is forgiven; a prisoner confesses the crime he is accused of, and is punished.

*To remark, to observe.* We remark, in the way of attention, in order to remember; we observe, in the way of examination, in order to judge. A traveller remarks the most striking objects he sees; a general observes all the motions of his enemy.

*Equivocal, ambiguous.* An equivocal expression is, one which has one sense open, and designed to be understood; another sense concealed, and understood only by the person who uses it. An ambiguous expression is, one which has apparently two senses, and leaves us at a loss which of them to give it. An equivocal expression is

used with an intention to deceive ; an ambiguous one, when it is used with design, is, with an intention not to give full information. An honest man will never employ an equivocal expression ; a confused man may often utter ambiguous ones, without any design. I shall only give one instance more.

*With, by.* Both these particles express the connection between some instrument, or means of effecting an end, and the agent who employs it ; but *with* expresses a more close and immediate connection ; *by*, a more remote one. We kill a man *with* a sword ; he dies *by* violence. The criminal is bound *with* ropes *by* the executioner. The proper distinction in the use of these particles is elegantly marked in a passage of Dr Robertson's History of Scotland. When one of the old Scottish kings was making an inquiry into the tenure *by* which his nobles held their lands, they started up, and drew their swords : “ *By* these,” said they, “ we acquired our lands, and *with* these we will defend them.” “ *By* these we acquired our lands,” signifies the more remote means of acquisition by force and martial deed ; and, “ *with* these we will defend them,” signifies the immediate direct instrument, the sword, which they would employ in their defence.

These are instances of words in our language, which, by careless writers, are apt to be employed



as perfectly synonymous, and yet are not so. Their significations approach, but are not precisely the same. The more the distinction in the meaning of such words is weighed and attended to, the more clearly and forcibly shall we speak or write \*.

From all that has been said on this head, it will now appear that, in order to write or speak with precision, two things are especially requisite ; one, that an author's own ideas be clear and distinct ; and the other, that we have an exact and full comprehension of the force of those words which he employs. Natural genius is here required ; labour and attention still more. Dean Swift is one of the authors, in our language, most distinguished for precision of style. In his writings, we seldom or never find vague expres-

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\* In French, there is a very useful treatise on the subject, the Abbé Girard's *Synonymes Francoises*, in which he has made a large collection of such apparent synonymes in the language, and shewn, with much accuracy, the difference in their signification. It is to be wished, that some such work were undertaken for our tongue, and executed with equal taste and judgment. Nothing would contribute more to precise and elegant writing. In the mean time, this French treatise may be perused with considerable profit. It will accustom persons to weigh, with attention, the force of words ; and will suggest several distinctions betwixt synonymous terms in our own language, analogous to those which he has pointed out in the French ; and, accordingly, several of the instances above given were suggested by the work of this author.

sions, and synonymous words, carelessly thrown together. His meaning is always clear, and strongly marked.

I had occasion to observe before, that though all subjects of writing or discourse demand perspicuity, yet all do not require the same degree of that exact precision which I have endeavoured to explain. It is, indeed, in every sort of writing, a great beauty to have, at least, some measure of precision, in distinction from that loose profusion of words which imprints no clear idea on the reader's mind. But we must, at the same time, be on our guard, lest too great a study of precision, especially in subjects where it is not strictly requisite, betray us into a dry and barren style; lest, from the desire of pruning too closely, we retrench all copiousness and ornament. Some degree of this failing may, perhaps, be remarked in Dean Swift's serious works. Attentive only to exhibit his ideas clear and exact, resting wholly on his sense and distinctness, he appears to reject, disdainfully, all embellishment, which, on some occasions, may be thought to render his manner somewhat hard and dry. To unite copiousness and precision, to be flowing and graceful, and at the same time correct and exact in the choice of every word, is, no doubt, one of the highest and most difficult attainments in writing. Some kinds of composition may require more of copiousness

and ornament ; others, more of precision and accuracy ; nay, in the same composition, the different parts of it may demand a proper variation of manner. But we must study never to sacrifice, totally, any one of these qualities to the other ; and by a proper management, both of them may be made fully consistent, if our own ideas be precise, and our knowledge and stock of words be, at the same time, extensive.

## LECTURE XI.

### STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES.

**H**AVING begun to treat of style, in the last Lecture, I considered its fundamental quality, perspicuity. What I have said of this, relates chiefly to the choice of words. From words I proceed to sentences ; and as, in all writing and discourse, the proper composition and structure of sentences is of the highest importance, I shall treat of this fully. Though perspicuity be the general head under which I, at present, consider language, I shall not confine myself to this quality alone in sentences, but shall require also, what is requisite for their grace and beauty : that I may bring together, under one view, all that seems necessary to be attended to in the construction and arrangement of words in a sentence.

It is not easy to give an exact definition of a sentence or period, farther, than as it always implies some one complete proposition or enunciation of thought. Aristotle's definition is, in the

main, a good one ; “ Λέξις ἐχῶσα ἀρχὴν καὶ τελευτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν, καὶ μέγεθος εὐσυνόπτου : A form of speech which hath a beginning and an end within itself, and is of such a length as to be easily comprehended at once.” This, however, admits of great latitude. For a sentence, or period, consists always of component parts, which are called its members ; and as these members may be either few or many, and may be connected in several different ways, the same thought, or mental proposition may often either be brought into one sentence, or split into two or three, without the material breach of any rule.

The first variety that occurs in the consideration of sentences, is the distinction of long and short ones. The precise length of sentences, as to the number of words, or the number of members, which may enter into them, cannot be ascertained by any definite measure. At the same time, it is obvious, there may be an extreme on either side. Sentences, immoderately long, and consisting of too many members, always transgress some one or other of the rules which I shall mention soon, as necessary to be observed in every good sentence. In discourses that are to be spoken, regard must be had to the easiness of pronunciation, which is not consistent with too long periods. In compositions where pronunciation has no place, still, however, by using long periods too frequently, an author overloads the reader’s ear, and fatigues his atten-



tion. For long periods require, evidently, more attention than short ones, in order to perceive clearly the connection of the several parts, and to take in the whole at one view. At the same time, there may be an excess in too many short sentences also; by which the sense is split and broken, the connection of thought weakened, and the memory burdened, by presenting to it a long succession of minute objects.

With regard to the length and construction of sentences, the French critics make a very just distinction of style, into *style periodique*, and *style coupé*. The *style periodique* is, where the sentences are composed of several members linked together, and hanging upon one another, so that the sense of the whole is not brought out till the close. This is the most pompous, musical, and oratorical manner of composing; as in the following sentence of Sir William Temple: “ If you  
“ look about you, and consider the lives of others  
“ as well as your own; if you think how few are  
“ born with honour, and how many die without  
“ name or children; how little beauty we see, and  
“ how few friends we hear of; how many diseases,  
“ and how much poverty there is in the world:  
“ you will fall down upon your knees, and, in-  
“ stead of repining at one affliction, will admire  
“ so many blessings which you have received from  
“ the hand of God.” (Letter to Lady Essex.) Cicero abounds with sentences constructed after this manner.

The *style coupé* is, where the sense is formed into short independent propositions, each complete within itself, as in the following of Mr Pope : “ I confess, it was want of consideration that made me an author. I writ, because it amused me. I corrected, because it was as pleasant to me to correct as to write. I published, because I was told I might please such as it was a credit to please.” (Preface to his works). This is very much the French method of writing ; and always suits gay and easy subjects. The *style periodique* gives an air of gravity and dignity to composition. The *style coupé* is more lively and striking. According to the nature of the composition, therefore, and the general character it ought to bear, the one or other may be predominant. But, in almost every kind of composition, the great rule is to intermix them. For the ear tires of either of them when too long continued : Whereas, by a proper mixture of long and short periods, the ear is gratified, and a certain sprightliness is joined with majesty in our style. “ Non semper,” says Cicero (describing, very expressly, these two different kinds of styles, of which I have been speaking), “ non semper utendum est perpetuitate, et quasi conversione verborum ; sed sæpe carpenda membris minutioribus oratio est \*.”

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\* “ It is not proper always to employ a continued train, and a sort of regular compass of phrases, but style ought to be often broken down into smaller numbers.”

This variety is of so great consequence, that it must be studied, not only in the succession of long and short sentences, but in the structure of our sentences also. A train of sentences, constructed in the same manner, and with the same number of members, whether long or short, should never be allowed to succeed one another. However musical each of them may be, it has a better effect to introduce even a discord, than to cloy the ear with the repetition of similar sounds : for nothing is so tiresome as perpetual uniformity. In this article of the construction and distribution of his sentences, Lord Shaftesbury has shewn great art. In the last Lecture, I observed, that he is often guilty of sacrificing precision of style to pomp of expression ; and that there runs through his whole manner a stiffness and affectation, which render him very unfit to be considered as a general model. But, as his ear was fine, and as he was extremely attentive to every thing that is elegant, he has studied the proper intermixture of long and short sentences, with variety and harmony in their structure, more than any other English author : and for this part of composition he deserves attention.

From these general observations, let us now descend to a more particular consideration of the qualities that are required to make a sentence perfect. So much depends upon the proper construction of sentences, that, in every sort of composition, we cannot be too strict in our attention to

it. For, be the subject what it will, if the sentences be constructed in a clumsy, perplexed, or feeble manner, it is impossible that a work, composed of such sentences, can be read with pleasure, or even with profit. Whereas, by giving attention to the rules which relate to this part of style, we acquire the habit of expressing ourselves with perspicuity and elegance; and if a disorder chance to arise in some of our sentences, we immediately see where it lies, and are able to rectify it\*.

The properties most essential to a perfect sentence, seem to me the four following: 1. Clearness and precision. 2. Unity. 3. Strength. 4. Harmony. Each of these I shall illustrate separately, and at some length.

The first is, clearness and precision. The least failure here, the least degree of ambiguity,

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\* On the structure of sentences, the ancients appear to have bestowed a great deal of attention and care. The treatise of Demetrius Phalereus *περί Ερμηνείας* abounds with observations upon the choice and collocation of words, carried to such a degree of nicety, as would frequently seem to us minute. The treatise of Dionysius of Halicarnassus *περί συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων*, is more masterly; but is chiefly confined to the musical structure of periods; a subject for which the Greek language afforded much more assistance to their writers than our tongue admits. On the arrangement of words in English sentences, the xviii<sup>th</sup> chapter of Lord Kaim's *Elements of Criticism* ought to be consulted; and also, the 2d volume of Dr Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

which leaves the mind in any sort of suspense as to the meaning, ought to be avoided with the greatest care; nor is it so easy a matter to keep always clear of this, as one might, at first, imagine. Ambiguity arises from two causes; either from a wrong choice of words, or a wrong collocation of them. Of the choice of words, as far as regards perspicuity, I treated fully in the Last Lecture. Of the collocation of them, I am now to treat. The first thing to be studied here, is, to observe exactly the rules of grammar, as far as these can guide us. But as the grammar of our language is not extensive, there may often be an ambiguous collocation of words, where there is no transgression of any grammatical rule. The relations which the words, or members of a period, bear to one another, cannot be pointed out in English, as in the Greek or Latin, by means of termination; it is ascertained only by the position in which they stand. Hence a capital rule in the arrangement of sentences is, that the words or members most nearly related, should be placed in the sentence, as near to each other as possible; so as to make their mutual relation clearly appear. This is a rule not always observed, even by good writers, as strictly as it ought to be. It will be necessary to produce some instances, which will both shew the importance of this rule, and make the application of it understood.

First, In the position of adverbs, which are used to qualify the signification of something which



either precedes or follows them, there is often a good deal of nicety. "By greatness," says Mr Addison, in the Spectator, No. 412. "I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view." Here the place of the adverb *only*, renders it a limitation of the following word *mean*. "I do not only mean." The question may then be put, What does he more than mean? Had he placed it after *bulk*, still it would have been wrong. "I do not mean the *bulk only* of any single object." For we might then ask, what does he mean more than the bulk? Is it the colour, or any other property? Its proper place, undoubtedly is, after the word *object*. "By greatness, I do not mean the bulk of any single object only;" for then, when we put the question, What more does he mean than the bulk of a single object? the answer comes out exactly as the author intends, and gives it; "the largeness of a whole view." "Theism," says Lord Shaftesbury, "can only be opposed to polytheism or atheism." Does he mean that theism is capable of nothing else, except being opposed to polytheism or atheism. This is what his words literally import, through the wrong collocation of *only*. He should have said, "Theism can be opposed only to polytheism or atheism." In like manner, Dean Swift (Project for the Advancement of Religion), "The Romans understood liberty, at least, as well as we." These words are capable of two different senses, according as the emphasis, in reading them, is laid upon *liberty*, or

upon *at least*. In the first case, they will signify, that whatever other things we may understand better than the Romans, *liberty*, at least, was one thing which they understood as well as we. In the second case, they will import, that liberty was understood, *at least*, as well by them as by us; meaning, that by them it was better understood. If this last, as I make no doubt, was Dean Swift's own meaning, the ambiguity would have been avoided, and the sense rendered independent of the manner of pronouncing, by arranging the words thus: "the Romans understood liberty, as well, at least, as we." The fact is, with respect to such adverbs as *only*, *wholly*, *at least*, and the rest of that tribe, that in common discourse, the tone and emphasis we use in pronouncing them, generally serves to shew their reference, and to make the meaning clear; and hence, we acquire a habit of throwing them in loosely in the course of a period. But, in writing, where a man speaks to the eye and not to the ear, he ought to be more accurate; and so to connect those adverbs with the words which they qualify, as to put his meaning out of doubt upon the first inspection.

Secondly, When a circumstance is interposed in the middle of a sentence, it sometimes requires attention how to place it, so as to divest it of all ambiguity. For instance; "Are these designs," (says Lord Bolingbroke, Dissert. on Parties, Dedicat.) "Are these designs, which any man,

“ who is born a Briton, in any circumstances, in  
“ any situation, ought to be ashamed or afraid to  
“ avow ?” Here we are left at a loss, whether these  
words, “ *in any circumstances, in any situation,*”  
are connected with “ a man born in Britain, in any  
“ circumstances, or situation,” or with that man’s  
avowing his designs, “ in any circumstances, or  
“ situation into which he may be brought ?” If the  
latter, as seems most probable, was intended to be  
the meaning, the arrangement ought to have been  
conducted thus : “ Are these designs, which any  
“ man who is born a Briton, ought to be ashamed  
“ or afraid, in any circumstances, in any situation,  
“ to avow ?” But,

Thirdly, Still more attention is required to  
the proper disposition of the relative pronouns,  
*who, which, what, whose*, and of all those particles  
which express the connection of the parts of  
speech with one another. As all reasoning de-  
pends upon this connection, we cannot be too ac-  
curate and precise here. A small error may over-  
cloud the meaning of the whole sentence ; and  
even where the meaning is intelligible, yet where  
these relative particles are out of their proper place,  
we always find something awkward and disjointed  
in the structure of the sentence. Thus, in the  
Spectator, No. 54. “ This kind of wit,” says  
Mr Addison, “ was very much in vogue among  
“ our countrymen, about an age or two ago, who  
“ did not practise it for any oblique reason, but

“ purely for the sake of being witty.” We are at no loss about the meaning here; but the construction would evidently be mended by disposing of the circumstance, “ about an age or two ago,” in such a manner as not to separate the relative *who* from its antecedent *our countrymen*, in this way : “ about an age or two ago, this kind of wit was very much in vogue among our countrymen, who did not practise it for any oblique reason, but purely for the sake of being witty.”—Spectator, No. 412. “ We no where meet with a more glorious and pleasing shew in nature, than what appears in the heavens at the rising and setting of the sun, *which* is wholly made up of those different stains of light, that shew themselves in clouds of a different situation.” *Which* is here designed to connect with the word *show*, as its antecedent; but it stands so wide from it, that without a careful attention to the sense, we should be naturally led, by the rules of syntax, to refer it to the rising and setting of the sun, or to the sun itself; and, hence, an indistinctness is thrown over the whole sentence. The following passage in Bishop Sherlock’s Sermons (Vol. II. Sermon 15.) is still more censurable : “ It is folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the accidents of life, by heaping up treasures, which nothing can protect us against, but the good providence of our Heavenly Father.” *Which* always refers grammatically to the immediately preceding substantive, which here is, “ treasures;” and this would make

nonsense of the whole period. Every one feels this impropriety. The sentence ought to have stood thus: "It is folly to pretend, by heaping  
" up treasures, to arm ourselves against the acci-  
" dents of life, which nothing can protect us  
" against, but the good providence of our Heavenly  
" Father."

Of the like nature is the following inaccuracy of Dean Swift's. He is recommending to young clergymen, to write their sermons fully and distinctly. "Many," says he, "act so directly  
" contrary to this method, that from a habit of  
" saving time and paper, which they acquired at  
" the university, they write in so diminutive a  
" manner, that they can hardly read what they  
" have written." He certainly does not mean, that they had acquired time and paper at the university, but that they had acquired this habit there; and therefore his words ought to have run thus: "from a habit which they have acquired at the  
" university of saving time and paper, they write  
" in so diminutive a manner." In another passage the same author has left his meaning altogether uncertain, by misplacing a relative. It is in the conclusion of his letter to a member of parliament, concerning the sacramental test: "Thus I have  
" fairly given you, Sir, my own opinion, as well  
" as that of a great majority of both houses here,  
" relating to this weighty affair; upon which I  
" am confident you may securely reckon." Now



I ask, what it is he would have his correspondent to reckon upon, securely? The natural construction leads to these words, "this weighty affair." But, as it would be difficult to make any sense of this, it is more probable he meant that the majority of both houses might be securely reckoned upon; though certainly this meaning, as the words are arranged, is obscurely expressed. The sentence would be amended by arranging it thus: "Thus, Sir, I have given you my own opinion, relating to this weighty affair, as well as that of a great majority of both houses here; upon which I am confident you may securely reckon."

Several other instances might be given; but I reckon those which I have produced sufficient to make the rule understood, that, in the construction of sentences, one of the first things to be attended to, is the marshalling of the words in such order as shall most clearly mark the relation of the several parts of the sentence to one another; particularly, that adverbs shall always be made to adhere closely to the words which they are intended to qualify; that, where a circumstance is thrown in, it shall never hang loose in the midst of a period, but be determined by its place to one or other member of it; and that every relative word which is used, shall instantly present its antecedent to the mind of the reader, without the least obscurity. I have mentioned these three cases,

because I think they are the most frequent occasions of ambiguity creeping into sentences.

With regard to relatives, I must farther observe, that obscurity often arises from the too frequent repetition of them, particularly of the pronouns *who* and *they*, and *them* and *theirs*, when we have occasion to refer to different persons; as, in the following sentence of Archbishop Tillotson (Vol. I. Sermon. 42.): “Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others; and think that their reputation obscures them, and their commendable qualities stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their virtues may not obscure them.” This is altogether careless writing. It renders style often obscure, always embarrassed and inelegant. When we find these personal pronouns crowding too fast upon us, we have often no method left, but to throw the whole sentence into some other form which may avoid those frequent references to persons who have before been mentioned.

All languages are liable to ambiguities. Quintilian gives us some instances in the Latin, arising from faulty arrangements. A man, he tells us, ordered, by his will, to have erected for him, after his death, “Statuam auream hastam tenentem;” upon which arose a dispute at law, whether the whole statue, or the spear only, was to be of gold?

The same author observes, very properly, that a sentence is always faulty, when the collocation of the words is ambiguous, though the sense can be gathered. If any one should say, "Chremetem " *audivi percussisse Demeam* ;" this is ambiguous both in sense and structure, whether Chremes or Demea gave the blow. But if this expression were used, " *Se vidisse hominem librum scribentem* ;" although the meaning be clear, yet Quintilian insists that the arrangement is wrong. " *Nam* ;" says he, " *etiamsi librum ab homine scribi pateat, non certè hominem a libro malè tamen composuerat, feceratque ambiguum quantum in ipso fuit.*" Indeed, to have the relation of every word and member of a sentence marked in the most proper and distinct manner, gives not clearness only, but grace and beauty to a sentence, making the mind pass smoothly and agreeably along all the parts of it.

I proceed now to the second quality of a well arranged sentence, which I termed its unity. This is a capital property. In every composition, of whatever kind, some degree of unity is required, in order to render it beautiful. There must be always some connecting principle among the parts. Some one subject must reign and be predominant. This, as I shall hereafter shew, holds in history, in epic and dramatic poetry, and in all orations. But most of all, in a single sentence, is required the strictest unity. For the very nature of a sen-

tence implies one proposition to be expressed. It may consist of parts indeed ; but these parts must be so closely bound together, as to make the impression upon the mind, of one object, not of many. Now, in order to preserve this unity of a sentence, the following rules must be observed.

In the first place, during the course of the sentence, the scene should be changed as little as possible. We should not be hurried by sudden transitions from person to person, nor from subject to subject. There is commonly, in every sentence, some person or thing which is the governing word. This should be continued so, if possible, from the beginning to the end of it. Should I express myself thus : “ After we came to anchor, they put me on shore, where I was welcomed by all my friends who received me with the greatest kindness.” In this sentence, though the objects contained in it have a sufficient connection with each other, yet, by this manner of representing them, by shifting so often both the place and the person, *we* and *they*, and *I* and *who*, they appear in such a disunited view, that the sense of connection is almost lost. The sentence is restored to its proper unity, by turning it after the following manner : “ Having come to an anchor, I was put on shore, where I was welcomed by all my friends, and received with the greatest kindness.” Writers who transgress this rule, for the most part transgress at the same time.

A second rule ; never to crowd into one sentence, things which have so little connection, that they could bear to be divided into two or three sentences. The violation of this rule never fails to hurt and displease a reader. Its effect, indeed, is so bad, that of the two, it is the safer extreme, to err rather by too many short sentences, than by one that is overloaded and embarrassed. Examples abound in authors. I shall produce some, to justify what I now say. "Archbishop Tillotson," says an author of the History of England, "died in this year. He was exceedingly beloved both by King William and Queen Mary, who nominated Dr Tennison, bishop of Lincoln, to succeed him." Who would expect the latter part of this sentence to follow, in consequence of the former ! "He was exceedingly beloved by both King and Queen," is the proposition of the sentence : we look for some proof of this, or at least something related to it, to follow : when we are on a sudden carried off to a new proposition, "who nominated Dr Tennison to succeed him." The following is from Middleton's Life of Cicero : "In this uneasy state, both of his public and private life, Cicero was oppressed by a new and cruel affliction, the death of his beloved daughter Tullia ; which happened soon after her divorce from Dolabella, whose manners and humours were entirely disagreeable to her." The principal object in this sentence is the death of Tullia, which was the cause of her father's affliction :



the date of it, as happening soon after her divorce from Dolabella, may enter into the sentence with propriety; but the subjunction of Dolabella's character is foreign to the main object, and breaks the unity and compactness of the sentence totally, by setting a new picture before the reader. The following sentence, from a translation of Plutarch, is still worse: "Their march," says the author, speaking of the Greeks under Alexander, "their march was through an uncultivated country, whose savage inhabitants fared hardly, having no other riches than a breed of lean sheep, whose flesh was rank and unsavoury, by reason of their continual feeding upon sea-fish." Here the scene is changed upon us again and again. The march of the Greeks, the description of the inhabitants through whose country they travelled, the account of their sheep, and the cause of their sheep being ill-tasted food, form a jumble of objects, slightly related to each other, which the reader cannot, without much difficulty, comprehend under one view.

These examples have been taken from sentences of no great length, yet over-crowded. Authors who deal in long sentences, are very apt to be faulty in this article. One need only open Lord Clarendon's History, to find examples everywhere. The long, involved, and intricate sentences of that author, are the greatest blemish of his composition; though in other respects, as a historian, he

has considerable merit. In later and more correct writers than Lord Clarendon, we find a period sometimes running out so far, and comprehending so many particulars, as to be more properly a discourse than a sentence. Take, for an instance, the following from Sir William Temple, in his Essay upon Poetry : “ The usual acceptation takes profit  
“ and pleasure for two different things ; and not  
“ only calls the followers or votaries of them by  
“ the several names of busy and idle men ; but distinguishes the faculties of the mind, that are  
“ conversant about them, calling the operations  
“ of the first, wisdom ; and of the other, wit ;  
“ which is a Saxon word used to express what the  
“ Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio*, and the  
“ French *esprit*, both from the Latin ; though I  
“ think wit more particularly signifies that of  
“ poetry, as may occur in remarks on the Runic  
“ language.” When one arrives at the end of such a puzzled sentence, he is surprised to find himself got to so great a distance from the object with which he at first set out.

Lord Shaftesbury, often betrayed into faults by his love of magnificence, shall afford us the next example. It is in his rhapsody, where he is describing the cold regions : “ At length, says he, “ the sun approaching, melts the snow, sets  
“ longing men at liberty, and affords them means  
“ and time to make provision against the next  
“ return of cold.” The first sentence is correct

enough ; but he goes on : “ It breaks the icy  
“ fetters of the main, where vast sea-monsters  
“ pierce through floating islands, with arms which  
“ can withstand the crystal rock ; whilst others,  
“ who of themselves seem great as islands, are by  
“ their bulk alone armed against all but man,  
“ whose superiority over creatures of such stupen-  
“ dous size and force, should make him mindful  
“ of his privilege of reason, and force him humbly  
“ to adore the great composer of these wondrous  
“ frames, and the author of his own superior  
wisdom.” Nothing can be more unhappy or  
embarrassed than this sentence ; the worse, too, as  
it is intended to be descriptive, where every thing  
should be clear. It forms no distinct image what-  
ever. The *it*, at the beginning, is ambiguous, whe-  
ther it mean the sun or the cold. The object is  
changed three times in the sentence ; beginning  
with the sun, which breaks the icy fetters of the  
main ; then the sea-monsters become the principal  
personages ; and, lastly, by a very unexpected  
transition, man is brought into view, and receives  
a long and serious admonition before the sentence  
closes. I do not at present insist on the improprie-  
ty of such expressions, as *God's being the composer  
of Frames* ; and the sea-monsters having *arms that  
withstand rocks*. Shaftesbury's strength lay in  
reasoning and sentiment, more than in description ;  
however much his descriptions have been some-  
times admired.

I shall only give one instance more on this head, from Dean Swift ; in his proposal, too, for correcting the English language, where, in place of a sentence, he has given a loose dissertation upon several subjects. Speaking of the progress of our language, after the time of Cromwell : “ To this succeeded,” says he, “ that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration; and, from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupt our language; which last was not likely to be much improved by those who at that time made up the court of King Charles the Second, either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these fanatic times ; or young men, who had been educated in the same country ; so that the court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued, the worst school in England for that accomplishment, and so will remain, till better care be taken in the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundation of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness.” How many different facts, reasonings, and observations, are here presented to the mind at once ! and yet so linked together by the author, that they all make parts of a sentence, which admits of no greater division in pointing, than a semicolon between any of its members. Having mentioned pointing, I shall here take notice

that it is in vain to propose, by arbitrary punctuation, to amend the defects of a sentence, to correct its ambiguity, or to prevent its confusion. For commas, colons, and points do not make the proper divisions of thought, but only serve to mark those which arise from the tenor of the author's expression; and therefore they are proper or not, just according as they correspond to the natural division of the sense. When they are inserted in wrong places, they deserve, and will meet with no regard.

I proceed to a third rule for preserving the unity of sentences, which is, to keep clear of all parentheses in the middle of them. On some occasions, these may have a spirited appearance, as prompted by a certain vivacity of thought, which can glance happily aside, as it is going along. But, for the most part, their effect is extremely bad: being a sort of wheels within wheels; sentences in the midst of sentences; the perplexed method of disposing of some thought, which a writer wants art to introduce in its proper place. It were needless to give many instances, as they occur so often among incorrect writers. I shall produce one from Lord Bolingbroke, the rapidity of whose genius and manner of writing betrays him frequently into inaccuracies of this sort. It is in the introduction to his *Idea of a Patriot King*, where he writes thus: "It seems to me, that in  
" order to maintain the system of the world, at a



“ certain point, far below that of ideal perfection,  
“ (for we are made capable of conceiving what we  
“ are incapable of attaining), but, however, suffi-  
“ cient upon the whole, to constitute a state easy  
“ and happy, or at the worst tolerable: I say, it  
“ seems to me, that the Author of Nature has  
“ thought fit to mingle, from time to time, among  
“ the societies of men, a few, and but a few, of  
“ those on whom he is graciously pleased to be-  
“ stow a larger portion of the ethereal spirit, than  
“ is given in the ordinary course of his government  
“ to the sons of men.” A very bad sentence this ;  
into which, by the help of a parenthesis, and other  
interjected circumstances, his Lordship had con-  
trived to thrust so many things, that he is forced to  
begin the construction again with the phrase *I say*,  
which, whenever it occurs, may always be assum-  
ed as a sure mark of a clumsy ill-constructed sen-  
tence ; excusable in speaking, where the greatest  
accuracy is not expected, but in polished writing  
unpardonable.

I shall add only one rule more for the unity  
of a sentence, which is, to bring it always to a full  
and perfect close. Every thing that is one should  
have a beginning, a middle, and an end. I need  
not take notice, that an unfinished sentence is no  
sentence at all, according to any grammatical rule.  
But very often we meet with sentences that are,  
so to speak, more than finished. When we have  
arrived at what we expected was to be the conclu-

sion, when we are come to the word on which the mind is naturally led, by what went before, to rest ; unexpectedly, some circumstance pops out, which ought to have been omitted, or to have been disposed of elsewhere ; but which is left lagging behind, like a tail adjoined to the sentence ; somewhat that, as Mr Pope describes the Alexandrine line,

“ Like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.”

All these adjections to the proper close, disfigure a sentence extremely. They give it a lame ungraceful air, and, in particular, they break its unity. Dean Swift, for instance, in his Letter to a Young Clergyman, speaking of Cicero's writings, expresses himself thus : “ With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who, by many degrees, excelled the other ; at least, as an orator.” Here the natural close of the sentence is at these words, “ excelled the other.” These words conclude the proposition ; we look for no more : and the circumstance added, “ at least, as an orator,” comes in with a very halting pace. How much more compact would the sentence have been, if turned thus : “ With these writings young divines are more conversant than with those of Demosthenes, who, by many degrees, as an orator at least, excelled the other.” In the following sentence, from Sir William Temple, the adjection to the sentence

is altogether foreign to it. Speaking of Burnet's Theory of the Earth, and Fontenelle's Plurality of Worlds, "The first," says he, "could not end his  
" learned treatise, without a panegyric of modern  
" learning in comparison of the ancient; and the  
" other falls so grossly into the censure of the old  
" poetry, and preference of the new, that I could  
" not read either of these strains without some in-  
" dignation, which no quality among men is so  
" apt to raise in me as self-sufficiency." The  
word "indignation" concluded the sentence; the  
last member, "which no quality among men is so  
" apt to raise in me as self-sufficiency," is a pro-  
position altogether new, added after the proper  
close.

## LECTURE XII.

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### STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES.

**H**AVING treated of perspicuity and unity, as necessary to be studied in the structure of sentences, I proceed to the third quality of a correct sentence, which I termed strength. By this, I mean, such a disposition of the several words and members, as shall bring out the sense to the best advantage ; as shall render the impression which the period is designed to make, most full and complete ; and give every word, and every member, their due weight and force. The two former qualities of perspicuity and unity are, no doubt, absolutely necessary to the production of this effect ; but more is still requisite. For a sentence may be clear enough, it may also be compact enough in all its parts, or have the requisite unity ; and yet, by some unfavourable circumstance in the structure, it may fail in that strength or liveliness of impression which a more happy arrangement would have produced.

The first rule which I shall give for promoting the strength of a sentence, is to divest it of all redundant words. These may, sometimes, be consistent with a considerable degree both of clearness and unity; but they are always enfeebling. They make the sentence move along tardy and encumbered:

*Est brevitæ opus, ut currat sententia, neu se  
Impediat verbis, lassas onerantibus aures \*.*

It is a general maxim, that any words which do not add some importance to the meaning of a sentence always spoil it. They cannot be superfluous, without being hurtful. "Obstat," says Quintilian, "quicquid non adjuvat." All that can be easily supplied in the mind is better left out in the expression. Thus: "Content with deserving a triumph, he refused the honour of it," is better language than to say, "Being content with deserving a triumph, he refused the honour of it." I consider it, therefore, as one of the most useful exercises of correction, upon reviewing what we have written or composed, to contract that roundabout method of expression, and to lop off those useless excrescences which are commonly found in a first draught. Here a severe eye should be

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\* "Concise your diction, let your sense be clear,  
Nor with a weight of words fatigue the ear."



employed; and we shall always find our sentences acquire more vigour and energy when thus retrenched; provided always, that we run not into the extreme of pruning so very close, as to give a hardness and dryness of style; for here, as in all other things, there is a due medium. Some regard, though not the principal, must be had to fulness and swelling of sound. Some leaves must be left to surround and shelter the fruit.

As sentences should be cleared of redundant words, so also of redundant members. As every word ought to present a new idea, so every member ought to contain a new thought. Opposed to this, stands the fault we sometimes meet with, of the last member of a period being no other than the echo of the former, or the repetition of it in somewhat a different form. For example, speaking of beauty, "The very first discovery of it," says Mr Addison, "strikes the mind with inward joy, and spreads delight through all its faculties." (No. 412.) And elsewhere, "It is impossible for us to behold the divine works with coldness or indifference, or to survey so many beauties, without a secret satisfaction and complacency." (No. 413.) In both these instances, little or nothing is added by the second member of the sentence to what was already expressed in the first; and though the free and flowing manner of such an author as Mr Addison, and the graceful harmony of his period, may pal-

liate such negligences, yet, in general, it holds, that style, freed from this prolixity, appears both more strong and more beautiful. The attention becomes remiss, the mind falls into inaction, when words are multiplied without a corresponding multiplication of ideas.

After removing superfluities, the second direction I give, for promoting the strength of a sentence, is, to attend particularly to the use of copulatives, relatives, and all the particles employed for transition and connection. These little words, *but*, *and*, *which*, *whose*, *where*, &c. are frequently the most important words of any; they are the joints or hinges upon which all sentences turn, and, of course, much, both of their gracefulness and strength, must depend upon such particles. The varieties in using them are, indeed, so infinite, that no particular system of rules, respecting them, can be given. Attention to the practice of the most accurate writers, joined with frequent trials of the different effects produced by a different usage of those particles, must here direct us\*. Some observations I shall mention, which have occurred to me as useful, without pretending to exhaust the subject.

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\* On this head Dr Lowth's Short Introduction to English Grammar deserves to be consulted; where several niceties of the language are well pointed out.

What is called splitting of particles, or separating a preposition from the noun which it governs, is always to be avoided. As if I should say, "Though virtue borrows no assistance from, yet it may often be accompanied by, the advantages of fortune." In such instances we feel a sort of pain from the revulsion, or violent separation of two things, which, by their nature, should be closely united. We are put to a stand in thought; being obliged to rest for a little on the preposition by itself, which, at the same time, carries no significance, till it is joined to its proper substantive noun.

Some writers needlessly multiply demonstrative and relative particles, by the frequent use of such phraseology as this: "There is nothing which disgusts us sooner than the empty pomp of language." In introducing a subject or laying down a proposition to which we demand particular attention, this sort of style is very proper; but in the ordinary current of discourse, it is better to express ourselves more simply and shortly: "Nothing disgusts us sooner than the empty pomp of language."

Other writers make a practice of omitting the relative, in a phrase of a different kind from the former, where they think the meaning can be understood without it. As, "The man I love."—"The dominions we possessed, and the conquests.

“ we made.” But though this elliptical style be intelligible, and is allowable in conversation and epistolary writing, yet, in all writings of a serious or dignified kind, it is ungraceful. There, the relative should always be inserted in its proper place, and the construction filled up : “ The man “ whom I love.”—“ The dominions which we “ possessed, and the conquests which we made.”

With regard to the copulative particle *and*, which occurs so frequently in all kinds of composition, several observations are to be made. First, It is evident, that the unnecessary repetition of it enfeebles style. It has the same sort of effect, as the frequent use of the vulgar phrase, *and so*, when one is telling a story in common conversation. We shall take a sentence from Sir William Temple, for an instance. He is speaking of the refinement of the French language : “ The academy “ set up by Cardinal Richelieu, to amuse the wits “ of that age and country, and divert them from “ raking into his politics and ministry, brought “ this into vogue ; and the French wits have, for “ this last age, been wholly turned to the refine- “ ment of their style and language ; and, indeed, “ with such success, that it can hardly be equal- “ led, and runs equally through their verse and “ their prose.” Here are no fewer than eight *ands* in one sentence. This agreeable writer too often makes his sentences drag in this manner, by a careless multiplication of copulatives. It is strange



how a writer so accurate as Dean Swift should have stumbled on so improper an application of this particle, as he has made in the following sentence; *Essay on the Fates of Clergymen*. "There  
 " is no talent so useful towards rising in the  
 " world, or which puts men more out of the reach  
 " of fortune, than that quality generally possessed  
 " by the dullest sort of people, and is, in common  
 " language, called discretion; a species of lower  
 " prudence, by the assistance of which," &c. By the insertion of, *and is*, in place of, *which is*, he has not only clogged the sentence, but even made it ungrammatical.

But, in the next place, it is worthy of observation, that though the natural use of the conjunction *and*, be to join objects together, and thereby, as one would think, to make their connection more close; yet in fact, by dropping the conjunction, we often mark a closer connection, a quicker succession of objects, than when it is inserted between them. Longinus makes this remark; which, from many instances, appears to be just: "*Veni, vidi, vici* \*," expresses with more spirit, the rapidity and quick succession of conquest, than if connecting particles had been used. So, in the following description of a rout in *Cæsar's Commentaries*: "*Nostri, emissis pilis, gladiis rem gerunt; repente post tergum equitatus cernitur; cohortes aliæ*

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\* "I came, I saw, I conquered."



“ appropinquant. Hostes terga vertunt ; fugientibus equites occurrunt ; fit magna cædes \*.” Bell. Gall. lib. 7.

Hence, it follows, that when, on the other hand, we seek to prevent a quick transition from one object to another, when we are making some enumeration in which we wish that the objects should appear as distinct from each other as possible, and that the mind should rest, for a moment, on each object by itself ; in this case, copulatives may be multiplied with peculiar advantage and grace. As when Lord Bolingbroke says, “ Such a man might fall a victim to power ; but truth, and reason, and liberty, would fall with him.” In the same manner Cæsar describes an engagement with the Nervii : “ His equitibus facile pulsus ac proturbatis, incredibili celeritate ad flumen decurrerunt ; ut pene uno tempore, et ad silvas, et in flumine, et jam in manibus nostris, hostes viderentur †.” Bell. Gall. lib. 2. Here, al-

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\* “ Our men, after having discharged their javelins, attack with sword in hand ; of a sudden the cavalry make their appearance behind ; other bodies of men are seen drawing near ; the enemies turn their backs ; the horse meet them in their flight ; a great slaughter ensues.”

† “ The enemy, having easily beat off, and scattered this body of horse, ran down with incredible celerity to the river ; so that, almost at one moment of time, they appeared to be in the woods, and in the river, and in the midst of our troops.”

though he is describing a quick succession of events, yet, as his intention is to shew in how many places the enemy seemed to be at one time, the copulative is very happily redoubled, in order to paint more strongly the distinction of these several places.

This attention to the several cases, when it is proper to omit, and when to redouble the copulative, is of considerable importance to all who study eloquence. For it is a remarkable particularity in language, that the omission of a connecting particle should sometimes serve to make objects appear more closely connected ; and that the repetition of it should distinguish and separate them in some measure from each other. Hence, the omission of it is used to denote rapidity ; and the repetition of it is designed to retard, and to aggravate. The reason seems to be, that, in the former case, the mind is supposed to be hurried so fast through a quick succession of objects, that it has not leisure to point out their connection ; it drops the copulatives in its hurry ; and crowds the whole series together, as if it were but one object. Whereas, when we enumerate, with a view to aggravate, the mind is supposed to proceed with a more slow and solemn pace ; it marks fully the relation of each object to that which succeeds it ; and, by joining them together with several copulatives, makes you perceive, that the objects, though connected, are yet, in themselves,

distinct; that they are many, not one. Observe, for instance, in the following enumeration, made by the apostle Paul, what additional weight and distinctness is given to each particular, by the repetition of a conjunction. “ I am persuaded that  
“ neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor princi-  
“ palities, nor powers, nor things present, nor  
“ things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any  
“ other creature, shall be able to separate us from  
“ the love of God.” Rom. viii. 38, 39. So much with regard to the use of copulatives.

I proceed to a third rule for promoting the strength of a sentence, which is to dispose of the capital word, or words, in that place of the sentence where they will make the fullest impression. That such capital words there are in every sentence, on which that meaning principally rests, every one must see; and that these words should possess a conspicuous and distinguished place, is equally plain. Indeed, that place of the sentence where they will make the best figure, whether the beginning, or the end, or sometimes, even the middle, cannot, as far as I know, be ascertained by any precise rule. This must vary with the nature of the sentence. Perspicuity must ever be studied in the first place; and the nature of our language allows no great liberty in the choice of collocation. For the most part, with us, the important words are placed in the beginning of the sentence. So Mr Addison; “ The pleasures of

“ the imagination, taken in their full extent, are  
“ not so gross as those of sense, so refined as those  
“ of the understanding.” And this, indeed, seems  
the most plain and natural order, to place that in  
the front, which is the chief object of the proposition we are laying down. Sometimes, however,  
when we intend to give weight to a sentence, it is  
of advantage to suspend the meaning for a little,  
and then bring it out full at the close: “ Thus,”  
says Mr Pope, “ on whatever side we contemplate  
“ Homer, what principally strikes us, is his wonderful invention.” (Pref. to Homer.)

The Greek and Latin writers had a considerable advantage above us, in this part of style. By the great liberty of inversion which their languages permitted, they could choose the most advantageous situation for every word; and had it thereby in their power to give their sentences more force. Milton, in his prose works, and some other of our old English writers, endeavoured to imitate them in this. But the forced constructions which they employed, produced obscurity; and the genius of our language, as it is now written and spoken, will not admit such liberties. Mr Gordon, who followed this inverted style in his translation of Tacitus, has sometimes done such violence to the language, as even to appear ridiculous; as in this expression: “ Into this hole thrust themselves, three Roman senators.” He has translated so simple a phrase as, “ Nullum eâ tempestate,



“bellum, by, “War at that time there was  
 “none.” However, within certain bounds, and  
 to a limited degree, our language does admit of  
 inversions; and they are practised with success by  
 the best writers. So Mr Pope, speaking of  
 Homer, “The praise of judgment Virgil has  
 “justly contested with him, but his invention  
 “remains yet unrivalled.” It is evident, that, in  
 order to give the sentence its due force, by con-  
 trasting properly the two capital words, “judg-  
 “ment and invention,” this is a happier arrange-  
 ment than if he had followed the natural order,  
 which was, “Virgil has justly contested with him  
 “the praise of judgment, but his invention re-  
 “mains yet unrivalled.”

Some writers practise this degree of inversion,  
 which our language bears, much more than others;  
 Lord Shaftesbury, for instance, much more than  
 Mr Addison; and to this sort of arrangement is  
 owing, in a great measure, that appearance of  
 strength, dignity, and varied harmony, which Lord  
 Shaftesbury's style possesses. This will appear from  
 the following sentences of his Enquiry into Vir-  
 tue; where all the words are placed, not strictly in  
 the natural order, but with that artificial construc-  
 tion, which may give the period most emphasis  
 and grace. He is speaking of the misery of vice:  
 “This, as to the complete immoral state, is,  
 “what of their own accord men readily remark.  
 “Where there is this absolute degeneracy, this



“ total apostasy from all candour, trust, or equity,  
“ there are few who do not see and acknowledge  
“ the misery which is consequent. Seldom is the  
“ case misconstrued when at worst. The misfor-  
“ tune is, that we look not on this depravity, nor  
“ consider how it stands, in less degrees. As if,  
“ to be absolutely immoral, were, indeed, the  
“ greatest misery ; but, to be so in a little degree,  
“ should be no misery or harm at all. Which to  
“ allow, is just as reasonable as to own, that 'tis  
“ the greatest ill of a body to be in the utmost  
“ manner maimed or distorted ; but that, to lose  
“ the use only of one limb, or to be impaired in  
“ some single organ or member, is no ill worthy  
“ the least notice.” (Vol. ii. p. 82.) Here is no  
violence done to the language, though there are  
many inversions. All is stately, and arranged with  
art ; which is the great characteristic of this au-  
thor's style.

We need only open any page of Mr Addison,  
to see quite a different order in the construction  
of sentences. “ Our sight is the most perfect and  
“ most delightful of all our senses. It fills the  
“ mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses  
“ with its objects at the greatest distance, and  
“ continues the longest in action, without being  
“ tired, or satiated with its proper enjoyments.  
“ The sense of feeling can, indeed, give us a no-  
“ tion of extension, shape, and all other ideas  
“ that enter at the eye, except colours ; but, at

“ the same time, it is very much straitened and confined in its operations,” &c. (Spectator, No. 411.) In this strain he always proceeds, following the most natural and obvious order of the language ; and if, by this means, he has less pomp and majesty than Shaftesbury, he has, in return, more nature, more ease and simplicity ; which are beauties of a higher order.

But whether we practise inversion or not, and in whatever part of the sentence we dispose of the capital words, it is always a point of great moment, that these capital words shall stand clear and disentangled from any other words that would clog them. Thus, when there are any circumstances of time, place, or other limitations, which the principal object of our sentence requires to have connected with it, we must take especial care to dispose of them, so as not to cloud that principal object, nor to bury it under a load of circumstances. This will be made clearer by an example. Observe the arrangement of the following sentence in Lord Shaftesbury's Advice to an Author. He is speaking of modern poets, as compared with the ancient : “ If, whilst they profess only to please, they secretly advise, and give instruction, they may now, perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed, with justice, the best and most honourable among authors.” This is a well constructed sentence. — It contains a great many circumstances and adverbs, necessary to qualify the

meaning ; *only, secretly, as well, perhaps, now, with justice, formerly* ; yet these are placed with so much art as neither to embarrass nor weaken the sentence, while that which is the capital object in it, viz. “ Poets being justly esteemed “ the best and most honourable among authors,” comes out in the conclusion clear and detached, and possesses its proper place. See, now, what would have been the effect of a different arrangement. Suppose him to have placed the members of the sentence thus : “ If, whilst they profess to “ please only, they advise and give instruction “ secretly, they may be esteemed the best and “ most honourable among authors, with justice, “ perhaps, now, as well as formerly.” Here we have precisely the same words and the same sense ; but, by means of the circumstances being so intermingled as to clog the capital words, the whole becomes perplexed, without grace, and without strength.

A fourth rule for constructing sentences with proper strength, is, to make the members of them go on rising and growing in their importance above one another. This sort of arrangement is called a climax, and is always considered as a beauty in composition. From what cause it pleases, is abundantly evident. In all things, we naturally love to ascend to what is more and more beautiful, rather than to follow the retrograde order. Having had once some considerable object set before us, it

is, with pain, we are pulled back to attend to an inferior circumstance. "Cavendum est," says Quintilian, whose authority I always willingly quote, "ne decrescat oratio, et fortiori subjungatur aliquid infirmius; sicut, sacrilegio, fur; aut latroni petulans. Augeri enim debent sententiæ et insurgere\*." Of this beauty, in the construction of sentences, the orations of Cicero furnish many examples. His pompous manner naturally led him to study it; and, generally, in order to render the climax perfect, he makes both the sense, and the sound rise together, with a very magnificent swell. So, in his oration for Milo, speaking of a design of Clodius's for assassinating Pompey: "Atque si res, si vir, si tempus ullum dignum fuit, certè hæc in illâ causâ summa omnia fuerunt. Insidiator erat in Foro collocatus, atque in vestibulo ipso Senatûs; ei viro autem mors parabatur, cujus in vitâ nitebatur salus civitatis; eo porrò reipublicæ tempore, quo si unus ille occidisset, non hæc solùm civitas, sed gentes omnes concidissent." The following instance, from Lord Bolingbroke, is also beautiful: "This decency, this grace, this propriety of manners to character, is so essential to

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\* "Care must be taken that our composition shall not fall off, and that a weaker expression shall not follow one of more strength; as if, after sacrilege, we should bring in theft; or, having mentioned a robbery, we should subjoin petulance. Sentences ought always to rise and grow."



“princes, in particular, that, whenever it is neglected, their virtues lose a great degree of lustre, and their defects acquire much aggravation. Nay more; by neglecting this decency and this grace, and for want of a sufficient regard to appearances, even their virtues may betray them into failings, their failings into vices, and their vices into habits unworthy of princes, and unworthy of men.” (Idea of a Patriot King).

I must observe, however, that this sort of full and oratorical climax, can neither be always obtained, nor ought to be always sought after. Only some kinds of writing admit such sentences; and to study them too frequently, especially if the subject require not so much pomp, is affected and disagreeable. But there is something approaching to a climax, which it is a general rule to study; “*ne decrescat oratio*,” as Quintilian speaks, “*et ne fortiori subjungatur aliquid infirmius*.” A weaker assertion or proposition should never come after a stronger one, and when our sentence consists of two members, the longest should, generally, be the concluding one. There is a twofold reason for this last direction. Periods thus divided, are pronounced more easily; and the shortest member being placed first, we carry it more readily in our memory as we proceed to the second, and see the connection of the two more clearly. Thus, to say, “When our passions have forsaken us, we flatter ourselves with the belief that we



“ have forsaken them,” is both more graceful and more clear, than to begin with the longest part of the proposition : “ We flatter ourselves with  
“ the belief that we have forsaken our passions,  
“ when they have forsaken us.” In general, it is always agreeable to find a sentence rising upon us, and growing in its importance to the very last word, when this construction can be managed without affectation, or unseasonable pomp. “ If  
“ we rise yet higher,” says Mr Addison, very beautifully, “ and consider the fixed stars as so  
“ many oceans of flame, that are each of them  
“ attended with a different set of planets ; and still  
“ discover new firmaments and new lights, that  
“ are sunk farther in those unfathomable depths  
“ of æther ; we are lost in such a labyrinth of suns  
“ and worlds, and confounded with the magnifi-  
“ cence and immensity of nature.” (Spect. No. 420.) Hence follows clearly,

A fifth rule for the strength of sentences ; which is, to avoid concluding them with an adverb, a preposition, or any inconsiderable word. Such conclusions are always enfeebling and degrading. There are sentences, indeed, where the stress and significancy rest chiefly upon some words of this kind. In this case they are not to be considered as circumstances, but as the capital figures ; and ought, in propriety, to have the principal place allotted them. No fault, for instance, can be found with this sentence of Bolingbroke's ; “ In

“ their prosperity, my friends shall never hear of me, in their adversity, always.” Where *never* and *always*, being emphatical words, were to be so placed, as to make a strong impression. But I speak now of those inferior parts of speech, when introduced as circumstances, or as qualifications of more important words. In such case they should always be disposed of in the least conspicuous parts of the period; and so classed with other words of greater dignity, as to be kept in their proper secondary station.

Agreeably to this rule, we should always avoid concluding with any of those particles which mark the cases of nouns, *of, to, from with, by*. For instance, it is a great deal better to say, “ Avarice is a crime of which wise men are often guilty,” than to say, “ Avarice is a crime which wise men are often guilty of.” This is a phraseology which all correct writers shun; and with reason. For, besides the want of dignity which arises from those monosyllables at the end, the imagination cannot avoid resting, for a little, on the import of the word which closes the sentence: And, as those prepositions have no import of their own, but only serve to point out the relations of other words, it is disagreeable for the mind to be left pausing on a word, which does not, by itself, produce any idea, nor form any picture in the fancy.

For the same reason, verbs which are used in a compound sense, with some of these prepositions, are, though not so bad, yet still not so beautiful conclusions of a period ; such as, *bring about, lay hold of, come over to, clear up*, and many other of this kind ; instead of which, if we can employ a simple verb, it always terminates the sentence with more strength. Even the pronoun *it*, though it has the import of a substantive noun, and indeed often forces itself upon us unavoidably, yet when we want to give dignity to a sentence, should, if possible, be avoided in the conclusion ; more especially when it is joined with some of the prepositions, as *with it, in it, to it*. In the following sentence of the Spectator, which otherwise is abundantly noble, the bad effect of this close is sensible : “ There is not, in my opinion, a more  
“ pleasing and triumphant consideration in reli-  
“ gion, than this, of the perpetual progress which  
“ the soul makes towards the perfection of its na-  
“ ture, without ever arriving at a period in it.” (No. 111.) How much more graceful the sentence, if it had been so constructed as to close with the word *period*.

Besides particles and pronouns, any phrase which expresses a circumstance only, always brings up the rear of a sentence with a bad grace. We may judge of this by the following sentence from Lord Bolingbroke, (Letter on the State of Parties at the Accession of King George I.) : “ Let me,

“ therefore, conclude by repeating, that division  
“ has caused all the mischief we lament; that  
“ union alone can retrieve it; and that a great ad-  
“ vance towards this union was the coalition of  
“ parties, so happily begun, so successfully carried  
“ on, and of late so unaccountably neglected, to  
“ say no worse.” This last phrase, *to say no worse*, occasions a sad falling off at the end; so much the more unhappy, as the rest of the period is conducted after the manner of a climax, which we expect to find growing to the last.

The proper disposition of such circumstances in a sentence, is often attended with considerable trouble, in order to adjust them so as shall consist equally with the perspicuity and the grace of the period. Though necessary parts, they are, however, like unshapely stones in a building, which try the skill of an artist, where to place them with the least offence. “Jungantur,” says Quintilian, “quo congruunt maxime; sicut in structurâ saxorum rudium, etiam ipsa enormitas invenit cui applicari, et in quo possit insistere\*.”

The close is always an unsuitable place for them. When the sense admits it, the sooner they

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\* “Let them be inserted wherever the happiest place for them can be found; as, in a structure composed of rough stones, there are always places where the most irregular and unshapely may find some adjacent one, to which it can be joined, and some basis on which it may rest.”



are dispatched, generally speaking, the better; that the more important and significant words may possess the last place, quite disencumbered. It is a rule, too, never to crowd too many circumstances together, but rather to intersperse them in different parts of the sentence, joined with the capital words on which they depend; provided that care be taken, as I before directed, not to clog those capital words with them. For instance, when Dean Swift says, "What I had the honour of mentioning to your Lordship, some time ago, in conversation, was not a new thought." (Letter to the earl of Oxford.) These two circumstances, *some time ago*, and *in conversation*, which are here put together, would have had a better effect disjoined, thus: "What I had the honour, some time ago, of mentioning to your Lordship in conversation." And in the following sentence of Lord Bolingbroke's (Remarks on the History of England): "A monarchy, limited like ours, may be placed, for aught I know, as it has often been represented, just in the middle point, from whence a deviation leads, on the one hand, to tyranny, and on the other to anarchy." The arrangement would have been happier thus: "A monarchy, limited like ours, may, for aught I know, be placed, as it has often been represented, just in the middle point," &c.

I shall give only one rule more relating to the strength of a sentence, which is, that in the



members of a sentence, where two things are compared or contrasted to each other; where either a resemblance or an opposition is intended to be expressed; some resemblance, in the language and construction, should be preserved. For when the things themselves correspond to each other, we naturally expect to find the words corresponding too. We are disappointed when it is otherwise; and the comparison, or contrast, appears more imperfect. Thus, when Lord Bolingbroke says, "The laughers will be for those who have most wit; the serious part of mankind, for those who have most reason on their side;" (Dissert. on Parties, Pref.) the opposition would have been more complete, if he had said, "The laughers will be for those who have most wit; the serious, for those who have most reason on their side." The following passage from Mr Pope's Preface to his Homer, fully exemplifies the rule I am now giving: "Homer was the greater genius; Virgil the better artist; in the one we must admire the man; in the other the work. Homer hurries us with a commanding impetuosity; Virgil leads us with an attractive majesty. Homer scatters with a generous profusion; Virgil bestows with a careful magnificence. Homer, like the Nile, pours out his riches with a sudden overflow; Virgil, like a river in its banks, with a constant stream.—And when we look upon their machines, Homer seems, like his own Jupiter in his terrors, shaking Olympus, scattering the

“lightnings, and firing the heavens; Virgil, like  
“the same power in his benevolence, counselling  
“with the gods, laying plans for empires, and or-  
“dering his whole creation.” Periods thus constructed, when introduced with propriety, and not returning too often, have a sensible beauty. But we must beware of carrying our attention to this beauty too far. It ought only to be occasionally studied, when comparison or opposition of objects naturally leads to it. If such a construction as this be aimed at in all our sentences, it leads to disagreeable uniformity; produces a regularly returning clink in the period, which tires the ear; and plainly discovers affectation. Among the ancients, the style of Isocrates is faulty in this respect; and, on that account, by some of their best critics, particularly by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, he is severely censured.

This finishes what I had to say concerning sentences, considered with respect to their meaning, under the three heads of perspicuity, unity, and strength. It is a subject on which I have insisted fully, for two reasons: First, because it is a subject which, by its nature, can be rendered more didactic, and subjected more to precise rule, than many other subjects of criticism; and next, because it appears to me of considerable importance and use.

For though many of these attentions, which I

have been recommending, may appear minute, yet their effect upon writing and style is much greater than might at first be imagined. A sentiment which is expressed in a period, clearly, neatly, and happily arranged, makes always a stronger impression on the mind than one that is feeble or embarrassed. Every one feels this upon a comparison; and if the effect be sensible in one sentence, how much more in a whole discourse, or composition, that is made up of such sentences.

The fundamental rule of the construction of sentences, and into which all others might be resolved, undoubtedly is, to communicate, in the clearest and most natural order, the ideas which we mean to transfuse into the minds of others. Every arrangement that does most justice to the sense, and expresses it to most advantage, strikes us as beautiful. To this point have tended all the rules I have given. And, indeed, did men always think clearly, and were they, at the same time, fully masters of the language in which they write, there would be occasion for few rules. Their sentences would then, of course, acquire all those properties of precision, unity, and strength, which I have recommended. For we may rest assured, that whenever we express ourselves ill, there is, besides the mismanagement of language, for the most part, some mistake in our manner of conceiving the subject. Embarrassed, obscure, and feeble

sentences, are generally, if not always, the result of embarrassed, obscure, and feeble thought. Thought and language act and re-act upon each other mutually. Logic and rhetoric have here, as in many other cases, a strict connection; and he that is learning to arrange his sentences with accuracy and order, is learning, at the same time, to think with accuracy and order; an observation which alone will justify all the care and attention we have bestowed on this subject.

## LECTURE XIII.

### STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES.—HARMONY.

**H**ITHERTO we have considered sentences with respect to their meaning, under the heads of perspicuity, unity, and strength. We are now to consider them with respect to their sound, their harmony, or agreeableness to the ear; which was the last quality belonging to them that I proposed to treat of.

Sound is a quality much inferior to sense; yet such as must not be disregarded. For, as long as sounds are the vehicle of conveyance for our ideas, there will be always a very considerable connection between the idea which is conveyed, and the nature of the sound which conveys it. Pleasing ideas can hardly be transmitted to the mind, by means of harsh and disagreeable sounds. The imagination revolts as soon as it hears them uttered. “Nihil,” says Quintilian “potest intrare in af-



“ *fectum quod in aure, velut quodam vestibulo statim offendit\**.” Music has naturally a great power over all men to prompt and facilitate certain emotions ; insomuch, that there are hardly any dispositions which we wish to raise in others, but certain sounds may be found concordant to those dispositions, and tending to promote them. Now, language may, in some degree, be rendered capable of this power of music ; a circumstance which must needs heighten our idea of language as a wonderful invention. Not content with simply interpreting our ideas to others, it can give them those ideas enforced by corresponding sounds ; and to the pleasure of communicated thought, can add the new and separate pleasure of melody.

In the harmony of periods, two things may be considered. First, agreeable sound, or modulation in general, without any particular expression : Next, the sound so ordered, as to become expressive of the sense. The first is the more common ; the second, the higher beauty.

First, Let us consider agreeable sound, in general, as the property of a well constructed sentence : and, as it was of prose sentences we have hitherto treated, we shall confine ourselves to them under this head. This beauty of musical construc-

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\* “ Nothing can enter into the affections, which stumbles at the threshold, by offending the ear.”

tion in prose, it is plain, will depend upon two things; the choice of words, and the arrangement of them.

I begin with the choice of words; on which head, there is not much to be said, unless I were to descend into a tedious and frivolous detail concerning the powers of the several letters, or simple sounds, of which speech is composed. It is evident that words are most agreeable to the ear which are composed of smooth and liquid sounds, where there is a proper intermixture of vowels and consonants; without too many harsh consonants rubbing against each other; or too many open vowels in succession, to cause a hiatus or disagreeable aperture of the mouth. It may always be assumed as a principle, that, whatever sounds are difficult in pronunciation, are, in the same proportion, harsh and painful to the ear. Vowels give softness; consonants, strength to the sound of words. The music of language requires a just proportion of both; and will be hurt, will be rendered either grating or effeminate, by an excess of either. Long words are commonly more agreeable to the ear than monosyllables. They please it by the composition, or succession of sounds which they present to it; and accordingly, the most musical languages abound most in them. Among words of any length, those are the most musical which do not run wholly either upon long or short syllables, but are composed of an intermixture of them; such

as *repent, produce, velocity, celerity, independent, impetuosity.*

The next head, respecting the harmony which results from a proper arrangement of the words and members of a period, is more complex, and of greater nicety. For, let the words themselves be ever so well chosen, and well-sounding, yet, if they be ill disposed, the music of the sentence is utterly lost. In the harmonious structure and disposition of periods, no writer whatever, ancient or modern, equals Cicero. He had studied this with care; and was fond, perhaps to excess, of what he calls the "*Plena ac numerosa oratio.*" We need only open his writings, to find instances that will render the effect of musical language sensible to every ear. What, for example, can be more full, round, and swelling, than the following sentence of the fourth Oration against Cataline? "*Cogitate quantis laboribus fundatum imperium, quanta virtute stabilitam libertatem, quanta Deorum benignitate auctas exaggeratasque fortunas, una nox pene delebit.*" In English, we may take, for an instance of a musical sentence, the following from Milton, in his treatise on Education: "*We shall conduct you to a hill-side, laborious indeed, at the first ascent; but else, so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospects, and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming.*" Every thing in this sentence conspires to promote the harmony.

The words are happily chosen ; full of liquids and soft sounds; *laborious, smooth, green, goodly, melodious, charming*: and these words so artfully arranged, that, were we to alter the collocation of any one of them, we should, presently, be sensible of the melody suffering. For, let us observe, how finely the members of the period swell one above another. “ So smooth, so green,”—“ so full of “ goodly prospects, and melodious sounds on “ every side ;”—till the ear, prepared by this gradual rise, is conducted to that full close on which it rests with pleasure ;—“ that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming.”

The structure of periods, then, being susceptible of a very sensible melody, our next inquiry should be, How this melodious structure is formed, what are the principles of it, and by what laws is it regulated? And, upon this subject, were I to follow the ancient rhetoricians, it would be easy to give a great variety of rules. For here they have entered into a very minute and particular detail, more particular, indeed, than on any other head that regards language. They hold, that to prose, as well as to verse, there belong certain numbers, less strict indeed, yet such as can be ascertained by rule. They go so far as to specify the feet, as they are called, that is, the succession of long and short syllables, which should enter into the different members of a sentence, and to shew what the effect of each of these will be. Wherever they treat of the structure of sentences, it is

always the music of them that makes the principal object. Cicero and Quintilian are full of this. The other qualities of precision, unity, and strength, which we consider as of chief importance, they handle slightly ; but when they come to the "*junctura et numeras*," the modulation and harmony, there they are copious. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, one of the most judicious critics of antiquity, has written a treatise on the *composition of words in a sentence*, which is altogether confined to their musical effect. He makes the excellency of a sentence to consist in four things ; first, in the sweetness of single sounds ; secondly, in the composition of sounds ; that is, the numbers or feet ; thirdly, in change or variety of sound ; and, fourthly, in sound suited to the sense. On all these points he writes with great accuracy and refinement ; and is very worthy of being consulted ; though, were one now to write a book on the structure of sentences, we should expect to find the subject treated of in a more extensive manner.

In modern times, this whole subject of the musical structure of discourse, it is plain, has been much less studied ; and, indeed, for several reasons, can be much less subjected to rule. The reasons it will be necessary to give, both to justify my not following the track of the ancient rhetoricians on this subject, and to shew how it has come to pass, that a part of composition, which once made so conspicuous a figure, now draws much less attention.



In the first place, the ancient languages, I mean the Greek and the Roman, were much more susceptible than ours, of the graces and the powers of melody. The quantities of their syllables were more fixed and determined; their words were longer and more sonorous; their method of varying the terminations of nouns and verbs, both introduced a greater variety of liquid sounds, and freed them from that multiplicity of little auxiliary words which we are obliged to employ; and, what is of the greatest consequence, the inversions which their languages allowed, gave them the power of placing their words in whatever order was most suited to a musical arrangement. All these were great advantages which they enjoyed above us, for harmony of period.

In the next place, the Greeks and Romans, the former especially were, in truth, much more musical nations than we; their genius was more turned to delight in the melody of speech. Music is known to have been a more extensive art among them than it is with us; more generally studied, and applied to a greater variety of objects. Several learned men, particularly the Abbé du Bos, in his *Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, have clearly proved, that the theatrical compositions of the ancients, both their tragedies and comedies, were set to a kind of music. Whence, the *modos fecit*, and the *tibiis dextris et sinistris*, prefixed to the editions of Terence's plays. All sort of decla-

mation and public speaking was carried on by them in a much more musical tone, than it is among us. It approached to a kind of chanting or recitative. Among the Athenians, there was what was called the nomic melody; or a particular measure prescribed to the public officers, in which they were to promulgate the laws to the people; lest, by reading them with improper tones, the laws might be exposed to contempt. Among the Romans there is a noted story of C. Gracchus, when he was declaiming in public, having a musician standing at his back, in order to give him the proper tones with a pipe or flute. Even when pronouncing those terrible tribunitial harangues, by which he inflamed the one half of the citizens of Rome against the other, this attention to the music of speech, was, in those times, it seems, thought necessary to success. Quintilian, though he condemns the excess of this sort of pronunciation, yet allows a "cantus obscurior" to be a beauty in a public speaker. Hence that variety of accents, acute, grave, and circumflex, which we find marked upon the Greek syllables, to express, not the quantity of them, but the tone in which they were to be spoken; the application of which is now wholly unknown to us. And though the Romans did not mark those accents in their writing, yet it appears from Quintilian, that they used them in pronunciation: "*Quantum quale,*" says he, "*comparantes gravi, interrogantes acuto*" "*tenore concludunt.*" As music, then, was an

object much more attended to in speech, among the Greeks and Romans, than it is with us; as, in all kinds of public speaking, they employed a much greater variety of notes, of tones, or inflections of voice, than we use; this is one clear reason of their paying a greater attention to that construction of sentences, which might best suit this musical pronunciation.

It is farther known, that, in consequence of the genius of their languages, and of their manner of pronouncing them, the musical arrangement of sentences did, in fact, produce a greater effect in public speaking among them, than it could possibly do in any modern oration; another reason why it deserved to be more studied. Cicero, in his treatise entitled *Orator*, tells us, “*Conciones sæpe exclamare vidi, cum verba apte cecidissent. Id enim expectant aures \**.” And he gives a remarkable instance of the effect of an harmonious period upon a whole assembly, from a sentence of one of Carbo’s orations, spoken in his hearing. The sentence was, “*Patris dictum sapiens temeritatis filii comprobravit.*” By means of the sound of which, alone, he tells us, “*Tantus clamor concionis excitatus est, ut prorsus admirabile esset.*” He makes us remark the feet of which these words

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\* “I have often been witness to bursts of exclamation in the public assemblies, when sentences closed musically; for that is a pleasure which the ear expects,”

consist, to which he ascribes the power of the melody; and shews how, by altering the collocation, the whole effect would be lost; as thus: "*Patris dictum sapiens comprobavit temeritas filii.*" Now, though it be true that Carbo's sentence is extremely musical, and would be agreeable at this day, to an audience, yet I cannot believe that an English sentence, equally harmonious, would, by its harmony alone, produce any such effect on a British audience, or excite any such wonderful applause and admiration, as Cicero informs us this of Carbo produced. Our northern ears are too coarse and obtuse. The melody of speech has less power over us; and by our simpler and plainer method of uttering words, speech is, in truth, accompanied with less melody than it was among the Greeks and Romans \*.

For these reasons, I am of opinion, that it is vain to think of bestowing the same attention upon the harmonious structure of our sentences, that was bestowed by these ancient nations. The doctrine of the Greek and Roman critics, on this head, has misled some to imagine, that it might be equally

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\* "*In versu quidem, theatra tota exclamant si fuit una syllaba aut brevior aut longior. Nec vero multitudo pedes novit, nec ullos numeros tenet; nec illud quod offendit, aut cur, aut in quo offendat, intelligit; et tamen omnium longitudinum et brevitatum in sonis, sicut acutarum, graviumque vocum, judicium ipsa natura in auribus nostris collocavit.*"

applied to our tongue ; and that our prose writing might be regulated by spondees and trochees, and iambuses and pæons, and other metrical feet. But, first, our words cannot be measured, or, at least, can be measured very imperfectly by any feet of this kind. For the quantity, the length and shortness of our syllables, is far from being so fixed and subjected to rule, as in the Greek and Roman tongues ; but very often left arbitrary, and determined by the emphasis, and the sense. Next, though our prose could admit of such metrical regulation, yet, from our plainer method of pronouncing all sort of discourse, the effect would not be at all so sensible to the ear, nor be relished with so much pleasure, as among the Greeks and Romans. And, lastly, this whole doctrine about the measures and numbers of prose, even as it is delivered by the ancient rhetoricians themselves, is, in truth, in a great measure loose and uncertain. It appears, indeed, that the melody of discourse was a matter of infinitely more attention to them, than ever it has been to the moderns. But though they write a great deal about it, they have never been able to reduce it to any rules which could be of real use in practice. If we consult Cicero's *Orator*, where this point is discussed with the most minuteness, we shall see how much these ancient critics differed from one another, about the feet proper for the conclusion, and other parts of a sentence ; and how much, after all, was left to the judgment of the ear. Nor, indeed, is it possible to give pre-



cise rules concerning this matter, in any language : as all prose composition must be allowed to run loose in its members ; and, according as the tenor of a discourse varies, the modulation of sentences must vary infinitely.

But, although I apprehend that this musical arrangement cannot be reduced into a system, I am far from thinking, that it is a quality to be neglected in composition. On the contrary, I hold its effect to be very considerable ; and that every one who studies to write with grace, much more who seeks to pronounce in public with success, will be obliged to attend to it not a little. But it is his ear, cultivated by attention and practice, that must chiefly direct him. For any rules that can be given on this subject, are very general. Some rules, however, there are, which may be of use to form the ear to the proper harmony of discourse. I proceed to mention such as appear to me most material.

There are two things on which the music of a sentence chiefly depends. These are, the proper distribution of the several members of it, and the close or cadence of the whole.

First, I say, the distribution of the several members is to be carefully attended to. It is of importance to observe, that, whatever is easy and agreeable to the organs of speech, always sounds

grateful to the ear. While a period is going on, the termination of each of its members form a pause, or rest, in pronouncing; and these rests should be so distributed, as to make the course of the breathing easy, and, at the same time, should fall at such distances, as to bear a certain musical proportion to each other. This will be best illustrated by examples. The following sentence is from Archbishop Tillotson: "This discourse concerning the easiness of God's commands, does, all along, suppose and acknowledge the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious course; except only in those persons who have had the happiness to be trained up to religion by the easy and insensible degrees of a pious and virtuous education." Here there is no harmony; nay, there is some degree of harshness and unpleasantness; owing principally to this, that there is, properly, no more than one pause or rest in the sentence, falling betwixt the two members into which it is divided; each of which is so long, as to occasion a considerable stretch of the breath in pronouncing it.

Observe, now on the other hand, the ease with which the following sentence, from Sir William Temple, glides along, and the graceful intervals at which the pauses are placed. He is speaking sarcastically of man; "But, God be thanked, his pride is greater than his ignorance, and what he wants in knowledge, he supplies by suffi-

“ciency. When he has looked about him, as far  
“as he can, he concludes there is no more to be  
“seen ; when he is at the end of his line, he is at  
“the bottom of the ocean ; when he has shot his  
“best, he is sure none ever did, or ever can, shoot  
“better, or beyond it. His own reason he holds  
“to be the certain measure of truth ; and his  
“own knowledge, of what is possible in nature \*.”  
Here every thing is, at once, easy to the breath,  
and grateful to the ear ; and it is this sort of flow-  
ing measure, this regular and proportional division  
of the members of his sentences, which renders  
Sir William Temple’s style always agreeable. I  
must observe, at the same time, that a sentence  
with too many rests, and these placed at intervals  
too apparently measured and regular, is apt to  
savour of affectation.

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\* On this instance. He is addressing himself to Lady Essex upon the death of her child : “ I was once in hope, that what  
“ was so violent could not be long. But when I observed your  
“ grief to grow stronger with age, and to increase, like a stream,  
“ the farther it ran ; when I saw it draw out to such unhappy  
“ consequences, and to threaten no less than your child, your  
“ health and your life, I could no longer forbear this endea-  
“ vour, nor end it, without begging of you, for God’s sake and  
“ for your own, for your children and your friends, your coun-  
“ try and your family, that you would no longer abandon your-  
“ self to a disconsolate passion ; but that you would, at length,  
“ awaken your piety, give way to your prudence, or, at least,  
“ rouse the invincible spirit of the Perceys, that never yet shrunk  
“ at any disaster.”

The next thing to be attended to, is, the close or cadence of the whole sentence, which, as it is always the part most sensible to the ear, demands the greatest care. So Quinctilian : “ Non igitur  
“ durum sit, neque abruptum, quo animi, velut,  
“ respirant ac reficiuntur. Hæc est sedes ora-  
“ tionis ; hoc auditor expectat ; hic laus omnis  
“ declamat\*.” The only important rule that can be given here is, that when we aim at dignity or elevation, the sound should be made to grow to the last ; the longest members of the period, and the fullest and most sonorous words, should be reserved to the conclusion. As an example of this, the following sentence of Mr Addison’s may be given : “ It fills the mind (speaking of sight)  
“ with the largest variety of ideas : converses  
“ with its objects at the greatest distance ; and  
“ continues the longest in action, without being  
“ tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments.” Every reader must be sensible of a beauty here, both in the proper division of the members and pauses, and the manner in which the sentence is rounded, and conducted to a full and harmonious close.

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\* “ Let there be nothing harsh or abrupt in the conclusion  
“ of the sentence, on which the mind pauses and rests. This  
“ is the most material part in the structure of discourse. Here  
“ every hearer expects to be gratified ; here his applause breaks  
“ forth.”

The same holds in melody, that I observed to take place with respect to significancy; that a falling off at the end always hurts greatly. For this reason, particles, pronouns, and little words, are as ungracious to the ear, at the conclusion, as I formerly shewed they were inconsistent with strength of expression. It is more than probable, that the sense and the sound have here a mutual influence on each other. That which hurts the ear, seems to mar the strength of the meaning; and that which really degrades the sense, in consequence of this primary effect, appears also to have a bad sound. How disagreeable is the following sentence of an author, speaking of the Trinity! "It is a mystery which we firmly believe the truth of, and humbly adore the depth of." And how easily might it have been mended by this transposition! "It is a mystery, the truth of which we firmly believe, and the depth of which we humbly adore." In general, it seems to hold, that a musical close, in our language, requires either the last syllable, or the last but one, to be a long syllable. Words which consist mostly of short syllables, as *contrary*, *particular*, *retrospect*, seldom conclude a sentence harmoniously, unless a run of long syllables, before, has rendered them agreeable to the ear.

It is necessary, however, to observe, that sentences, so constructed as to make the sound always swell and grow towards the end, and to rest either



on a long or a penult long syllable, give a discourse the tone of declamation. The ear soon becomes acquainted with the melody, and is apt to be cloyed with it. If we would keep up the attention of the reader or hearer, if we would preserve vivacity and strength in our composition, we must be very attentive to vary our measures. This regards the distribution of the members, as well as the cadence of the period. Sentences constructed in a similar manner, with the pauses falling at equal intervals, should never follow one another. Short sentences should be intermixed with long and swelling ones, to render discourse sprightly, as well as magnificent. Even discords, properly introduced, abrupt sounds, departures from regular cadence, have sometimes a good effect. Monotony is a great fault into which writers are apt to fall, who are fond of harmonious arrangement: and to have only one tune, or measure, is not much better than having none at all. A very vulgar ear will enable a writer to catch some one melody, and to form the run of his sentences according to it; which soon proves disgusting. But a just, a correct ear is requisite for varying and diversifying the melody; and hence we so seldom meet with authors, who are remarkably happy in this respect.

Though attention to the music of sentences must not be neglected, yet it must also be kept within proper bounds: for all appearances of an author's affecting harmony, are disagreeable; es-

pecially when the love of it betrays him so far, as to sacrifice, in any instance, perspicuity, precision, or strength of sentiment, to sound. All unmeaning words, introduced merely to round the period, or fill up the melody, *complementa numerorum*, as Cicero calls them, are great blemishes in writing. They are childish and puerile ornaments, by which a sentence always loses more in point of weight, than it can gain by such additions to the beauty of its sound. Sense has its own harmony as well as sound; and where the sense of a period is expressed with clearness, force, and dignity, it will seldom happen but the words will strike the ear agreeably; at least a very moderate attention is all that is requisite for making the cadence of such a period pleasing: and the effect of greater attention is often no other, than to render composition languid and enervated. After all the labour which Quintilian bestows on regulating the measures of prose, he comes at last, with his usual good sense, to this conclusion: “In universum, si sit necesse  
 “duram potius atque asperam compositionem ma-  
 “lim esse, quam effeminatam ac enervem, qualis  
 “apud multos. Ideoque, vineta quædam de in-  
 “dustria sunt solvenda, ne laborata videantur;  
 “neque ullum idoneum aut aptum verbum præ-  
 “termittamus, gratia lenitatis\*.” Lib. ix. c. 4.

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\* “Upon the whole, I would rather choose that composition  
 “should appear rough and harsh, if that be necessary, than that

Cicero, as I before observed, is one of the most remarkable patterns of a harmonious style. His love of it, however, is too visible; and the pomp of his numbers sometimes detracts from his strength. The noted close of his *esse videatur*, which, in the Oration Pro Lege Manilia, occurs eleven times, exposed him to censure among his contemporaries. We must observe, however, in defence of this great orator, that there is a remarkable union in his style, of harmony with ease, which is always a great beauty: and if his harmony be studied, that study appears to have cost him little trouble.

Among our English classics, not many are distinguished for musical arrangement. Milton, in some of his prose works, has very finely turned periods; but the writers of his age indulged a liberty of inversion, which now would be reckoned contrary to purity of style; and though this allowed their sentences to be more stately and sonorous, yet it gave them too much of a Latinised construction and order. Of later writers, Shaftesbury is, upon the whole, the most correct in his numbers.

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“ it should be enervated and effeminate, such as we find the style  
 “ of too many. Some sentences, therefore, which we have stu-  
 “ diously formed into melody, should be thrown loose, that they  
 “ may not seem too much laboured; nor ought we ever to omit  
 “ any proper or expressive word, for the sake of smoothing a  
 “ period.”

As his ear was delicate, he has attended to music in all his sentences; and he is peculiarly happy in this respect, that he has avoided the monotony into which writers, who study the grace of sound, are very apt to fall: having diversified his periods with great variety. Mr Addison has also much harmony in his style, more easy and smooth, but less varied, than Lord Shaftesbury. Sir William Temple is, in general, very flowing and agreeable. Archbishop Tillotson is too often careless and languid; and is much outdone by Bishop Atterbury in the music of his periods. Dean Swift despised musical arrangement altogether.

Hitherto I have discoursed of agreeable sound, or modulation, in general. It yet remains to treat of a higher beauty of this kind; the sound adapted to the sense. The former was no more than a simple accompaniment, to please the ear; the latter supposes a peculiar expression given to the music. We may remark two degrees of it: First, the current of sound, adapted to the tenor of a discourse; next, to a particular resemblance effected between some object, and the sounds that are employed in describing it.

First, I say, the current of sound may be adapted to the tenor of a discourse. Sounds have, in many respects, a correspondence with our ideas: partly natural, partly the effect of artificial associations. Hence it happens, that any one modu-

lation of sound continued, imprints on our style a certain character and expression. Sentences constructed with the Ciceronian fulness and swell, produce the impression of what is important, magnificent, sedate ; for this is the natural tone which such a course of sentiment assumes. But they suit no violent passion, no eager reasoning, no familiar address. These always require measures brisker, easier, and often more abrupt ; and, therefore, to swell, or to let down the periods, as the subject demands, is a very important rule in oratory. No one tenor whatever, supposing it to produce no bad effect from satiety, will answer to all different compositions ; nor even to all the parts of the same composition. It were as absurd to write a panegyric, and an invective, in a style of the same cadence, as to set the words of a tender love-song to the air of a warlike march.

Observe how finely the following sentence of Cicero is adapted to represent the tranquillity and ease of a satisfied state ; “ *Etsi homini nihil est magis optandum quam prospera, æquabilis, perpetuaque fortuna, secundo vitæ sine ulla offensione cursu ; tamen, si mihi tranquilla et placata omnia fuissent, incredibili quâdam et pene divinâ, quâ nunc vestro beneficio fruor, lætitiæ voluptate caruissem* \*.” Nothing was ever more perfect in its kind : it paints, if we may so speak,

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\* Orat. ad Quirites, post Reditum.



to the ear. But who would not have laughed, if Cicero had employed such periods, or such a cadence as this, in inveighing against Mark Antony, or Cataline? What is requisite, therefore, is, that we previously fix, in our mind, a just idea of the general tone of sound which suits our subject; that is, which the sentiments we are to express, most naturally assume, and in which they most commonly vent themselves; whether round or smooth, or stately and solemn, or brisk and quick, or interrupted and abrupt. This general idea must direct the modulation of our periods; to speak in the style of music, must give us the key-note, must form the ground of the melody; varied and diversified in parts, according as either our sentiments are diversified, or as is requisite for producing a suitable variety to gratify the ear.

It may be proper to remark, that our translators of the Bible have often been happy in suiting their numbers to the subject. Grave, solemn, and majestic subjects undoubtedly require such an arrangement of words as runs much on long syllables; and, particularly, they require the close to rest upon such. The very first verses of the Bible, are remarkable for this melody; "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Several other passages, particularly

some of the Psalms, afford striking examples of this sort of grave, melodious construction. Any composition that rises considerably above the ordinary tone of prose, such as monumental inscriptions, and panegyrical characters, naturally runs into numbers of this kind.

But, in the next place, besides the general correspondence of the current of sound with the current of thought, there may be a more particular expression attempted, of certain objects, by means of resembling sounds. This can be sometimes accomplished in prose composition; but there only in a more faint degree; nor is it so much expected there. In poetry, chiefly, it is looked for; where attention to sound is more demanded, and where the inversions and liberties of poetical style give us a greater command of sound; assisted, too, by the versification, and that *cantus obscurior*, to which we are naturally led in reading poetry. This requires a little more illustration.

The sounds of words may be employed for representing, chiefly, three classes of objects; first, other sounds; secondly, motion; and, thirdly, the emotions and passions of the mind.

First, I say, by a proper choice of words, we may produce a resemblance of other sounds which we mean to describe; such as, the noise of waters, the roaring of winds, or the murmuring of streams.

This is the simplest instance of this sort of beauty. For the medium through which we imitate, here, is a natural one; sounds, represented by other sounds; and between ideas of the same sense, it is easy to form a connection. No very great art is required in a poet, when he is describing sweet and soft sounds to make use of such words as have most liquids and vowels, and glide the softest; or, when he is describing harsh sounds, to throw together a number of harsh syllables which are of difficult pronunciation. Here the common structure of language assists him; for, it will be found, that, in most languages, the names of many particular sounds are so formed, as to carry some affinity to the sound which they signify; as with us, the *whistling* of winds, the *buz* and *hum* of insects, the *hiss* of serpents, the *crash* of falling timber; and many other instances, where the word has been plainly framed upon the sound it represents. I shall produce a remarkable example of this beauty from Milton, taken from two passages in *Paradise Lost*, describing the sound made, in the one, by the opening of the gates of hell; in the other, by the opening of those in heaven. The contrast between the two displays, to great advantage, the poet's art. The first is the opening of hell's gates:

—————On a sudden, open fly,  
With impetuous recoil, and jarring sound,  
Th' infernal doors; and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder.——

Observe, now the smoothness of the other :

—————Heaven opened wide  
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound,  
On golden hinges turning.——

B. ii.

The following beautiful passage from Tasso's *Gierusalemme*, has often been admired, on account of the imitation effected by sound of the thing represented :

Chiama gli habitator de l'ombre eterne  
Il rauco suon de la Tartareo tromba :  
Treman le spaciose atre caverne,  
Et l'aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba ;  
Ni stridendo cosi de la superne  
Regioni dele cielo, il folgor piomba ;  
Ne si scossa giammai la terra,  
Quand i vapori in sen gravida serra.

CANT. IV. Stanz. 4.

The second class of objects which the sound of words is often employed to imitate, is, motion ; as it is swift or slow, violent or gentle, equable or interrupted, easy or accompanied with effort. Though there be no natural affinity between sound of any kind, and motion, yet, in the imagination, there is a strong one ; as appears from the connection between music and dancing. And, therefore, here it is in the poet's power to give us a lively idea of the kind of motion he would describe, by means of sounds which correspond, in our imagination, with that motion. Long syllables natu-

rally give the impression of slow motion ; as in this line of Virgil :

Olli inter sese magna vi brachia tollunt.

A succession of short syllables presents quick motion to the mind ; as,

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

Both Homer and Virgil are great masters of this beauty, and their works abound with instances of it ; most of them, indeed, so often quoted and so well known that it is needless to produce them. I shall give one instance, in English, which seems happy. It is the description of a sudden calm on the seas, in a poem, entitled, *The Fleece*.

———With easy course

The vessels glide ; unless their speed be stopped

By dead calms, that oft lie on these smooth seas

When every zephyr sleeps ; then the shrouds drop ;

The downy feather on the cordage hung

Moves not ; the flat sea shines like yellow gold

Fus'd in the fire, or like the marble floor

Of some old temple wide.——

The third set of objects, which I mentioned the sound of words as capable of representing, consists of the passions and emotions of the mind. Sound may, at first view, appear foreign to these ; but that here, also, there is some sort of connection, is sufficiently proved by the power which music has



to awaken, or to assist certain passions, and, according as its strain is varied, to introduce one train of ideas, rather than another. This, indeed, logically speaking, cannot be called a resemblance between the sense and the sound, seeing long or short syllables have no natural resemblance to any thought or passion. But if the arrangement of syllables, by their sound alone, recal one set of ideas more readily than another, and dispose the mind for entering into that affection which the poet means to raise, such arrangement may, justly enough, be said to resemble the sense, or be similar and correspondent to it. I admit, that, in many instances, which are supposed to display this beauty of accommodation of sound to the sense, there is much room for imagination to work; and, according as a reader is struck by a passage, he will often fancy a resemblance between the sound and the sense, which others cannot discover. He modulates the numbers to his own disposition of mind; and, in effect, makes the music which he imagines himself to hear. However, that there are real instances of this kind, and that poetry is capable of some such expression, cannot be doubted. Dryden's Ode on St Cecilia's Day, affords a very beautiful exemplification of it, in the English language. Without much study or reflection, a poet describing pleasure, joy, and agreeable objects, from the feeling of his subject, naturally runs into smooth, liquid, and flowing numbers:

———*Namque ipsa decoram  
Cæsariem nato genetrix, lumenque juvenæ  
Purpureum, et lætos oculis afflârat honores.*

ÆN. I.

Or,

*Devenêre locos lætos et amæna vireta,  
Fortunatorum memorum, sedesque beatas ;  
Largior hic campos æther, et lumine vestit  
Purpureo, solemque suum, sua sidera norant.*

ÆN. VI.

Brisk and lively sensations exact quicker and more animated numbers :

———*Juvenum manus emicat ardens  
Littus in Hesperium.*

ÆN. VII.

Melancholy and gloomy subjects naturally express themselves in slow measures, and long words ;

*In those deep solitudes and awful cells,  
Where heavenly pensive contemplation dwells.*

*Et caligantem nigra formidine lucum.*

I have now given sufficient openings into this subject : a moderate acquaintance with the good poets, either ancient or modern, will suggest many instances of the same kind. And with this I finish the discussion of the structure of sentences ; having fully considered them under all the heads I mentioned ; of perspicuity, unity, strength, and musical arrangement.

## LECTURE XIV.

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### ORIGIN AND NATURE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

**H**AVING now finished what related to the construction of sentences, I proceed to other rules concerning style. My general division of the qualities of style, was into perspicuity and ornament. Perspicuity, both in single words and in sentences, I have considered. Ornament, as far as it arises from a graceful, strong, or melodious construction of words, has also been treated of. Another, and a great branch of the ornament of style, is figurative language; which is now to be the subject of our consideration, and will require a full discussion.

Our first inquiry must be, what is meant by figures of speech\*?

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\* On the subject of figures of speech, all the writers who treat of rhetoric or composition, have insisted largely. To make references, therefore, on this subject, were endless. On the

In general, they always imply some departure from simplicity of expression; the idea which we intend to convey, not only enunciated to others, but enunciated in a particular manner, and with some circumstance added which is designed to render the impression more strong and vivid. When I say, for instance, "That a good man enjoys comfort in the midst of adversity;" I just express my thought in the simplest manner possible. But when I say, "To the upright there ariseth light in darkness;" the same sentiment is expressed in a figurative style; a new circumstance is introduced; light is put in the place of comfort, and darkness is used to suggest the idea of adversity. In the same manner, to say, "it is impossible, by any search we can make, to explore the divine nature fully," is to make a simple proposition. But when we say, "Canst thou, by searching, find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as Heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know?" This introduces a figure into style; the proposition being not only expressed, but admiration and astonishment being expressed together with it.

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foundations of figurative language, in general, one of the most sensible and instructive writers appears to me to be M. Mar-sais, in his *Traité des Tropes, pour servir d'Introduction à la Rhétorique, et à la Logique*. For observations on particular figures, the *Elements of Criticism* may be consulted, where the subject is fully handled, and illustrated by a great variety of examples.

But, though figures imply a deviation from what may be reckoned the most simple form of speech, we are not thence to conclude, that they imply any thing uncommon, or unnatural. This is so far from being the case, that on very many occasions, they are both the most natural, and the most common method of uttering our sentiments. It is impossible to compose any discourse without using them often ; nay, there are few sentences of any length, in which some expression or other, that may be termed a figure, does not occur. From what causes this happens, shall be afterwards explained. The fact, in the mean time, shews that they are to be accounted part of that language which nature dictates to man. They are not the inventions of the schools, nor the mere product of study : on the contrary, the most illiterate speak in figures, as often as the most learned. Whenever the imaginations of the vulgar are much awakened, or their passions inflamed against one another, they will pour forth a torrent of figurative language, as forcible as could be employed by the most artificial declaimer.

What then is it, which has drawn the attention of critics and rhetoricians so much to these forms of speech? It is this: They remarked, that in them consists much of the beauty and the force of language; and found them always to bear some characters, or distinguishing marks, by the help of which they could reduce them under separate classes and heads. To this, perhaps, they owe their name



of figures. As the figure or shape of one body distinguishes it from another, so these forms of speech have, each of them, a cast or turn peculiar to itself, which both distinguishes it from the rest, and distinguishes it from simple expression. Simple expression just makes our idea known to others; but figurative language, over and above, bestows a particular dress upon that idea; a dress which both makes it to be remarked, and adorns it. Hence, this sort of language became early a capital object of attention to those who studied the powers of speech.

Figures, in general, may be described to be that language, which is prompted either by the imagination, or by the passions. The justness of this description will appear, from the more particular account I am afterwards to give of them. Rhetoricians commonly divide them into two great classes; figures of words, and figures of thought. The former, figures of words, are commonly called tropes, and consist in a word's being employed to signify something that is different from its original and primitive meaning; so that if you alter the word, you destroy the figure. Thus, in the instance I gave before; "Light ariseth to the upright in darkness;" the trope consists in "light and darkness," being not meant literally, but substituted for comfort and adversity, on account of some resemblance or analogy which they are supposed to bear to these conditions of

life. The other class, termed figures of thought, supposes the words to be used in their proper and literal meaning, and the figure to consist in the turn of the thought; as is the case in exclamations, interrogations, apostrophes, and comparisons; where, though you vary the words that are used, or translate them from one language into another, you may, nevertheless, still preserve the same figure in the thought. This distinction, however, is of no great use; as nothing can be built upon it in practice; neither is it always very clear. It is of little importance, whether we give to some particular mode of expression the name of a trope, or of a figure; provided we remember, that figurative language always imports some colouring of the imagination, or some emotion of passion, expressed in our style: And, perhaps, figures of imagination, and figures of passion, might be a more useful distribution of the subject. But, without insisting on any artificial divisions, it will be more useful that I inquire into the origin and the nature of figures. Only, before I proceed to this, there are two general observations which it may be proper to premise.

The first is, concerning the use of rules with respect to figurative language. I admit, that persons may both speak and write with propriety who know not the names of any of the figures of speech, nor ever studied any rules relating to them. Nature, as was before observed, dictates

the use of figures ; and like Mons. Jourdain, in Moliere, who had spoken for forty years in prose, without ever knowing it, many a one uses metaphorical expressions for good purpose, without any idea of what a metaphor is. It will not, however, follow thence, that rules are of no service. All science arises from observations on practice. Practice has always gone before method and rule ; but method and rule have afterwards improved and perfected practice in every art. We every day meet with persons who sing agreeably without knowing one note of the gamut ; yet it has been found of importance to reduce these notes to a scale, and to form an art of music ; and it would be ridiculous to pretend, that the art is of no advantage, because the practice is founded in nature. Propriety and beauty of speech are certainly as improveable as the ear or the voice ; and to know the principles of this beauty, or the reasons which render one figure, or one manner of speech preferable to another, cannot fail to assist and direct a proper choice.

But I must observe, in the next place, that, although this part of style merits attention, and is a very proper object of science and rule ; although much of the beauty of composition depends on figurative language ; yet we must beware of imagining that it depends solely, or even chiefly, upon such language. It is not so. The great place which the doctrine of tropes and figures has

occupied in systems of rhetoric ; the over-anxious care which has been shewn in giving names to a vast variety of them, and in ranging them under different classes, has often led persons to imagine, that, if their composition was well bespangled with a number of these ornaments of speech, it wanted no other beauty ; whence has arisen much stiffness and affectation. For it is, in truth, the sentiment or passion, which lies under the figured expression that gives it any merit. The figure is only the dress ; the sentiment is the body and the substance. No figures will render a cold or an empty composition interesting ; whereas, if a sentiment be sublime or pathetic, it can support itself perfectly well, without any borrowed assistance. Hence several of the most affecting and admired passages of the best authors, are expressed in the simplest language. The following sentiment from Virgil, for instance, makes its way at once to the heart, without the help of any figure whatever. He is describing an Argive, who falls in battle in Italy, at a great distance from his native country.

*Sternitur, infelix, alieno vulnere, cœlumque  
Aspicit, et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos \*.*

*ÆN. X. 781.*

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- \* “ Anthares had from Argos travell’d far,  
“ Alcides’ friend, and brother of the war ;  
“ Now falling, by another’s wound, his eyes  
“ He casts to Heaven, on Argos thinks and dies.”

A single stroke of this kind, drawn as by the very pencil of nature, is worth a thousand figures. In the same manner, the simple style of Scripture: "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "God said, Let there be light; and there was light;" imparts a lofty conception to much greater advantage than if it had been decorated by the most pompous metaphors. The fact is, that the strong pathetic, and

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In this translation much of the beauty of the original is lost. "On Argos thinks, and dies," is by no means equal to "Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos:" "As he dies, he remembers his beloved Argos." It is indeed observable, that in most of those tender and pathetic passages, which do so much honour to Virgil, that great poet expresses himself with the utmost simplicity; as,

Te, dulcis conjux, te solo in littore secum,

Te veniente die, te decedente canebat. GEORG. IV.

And so in that moving prayer of Evander, upon his parting with his son Pallas:

At vos, O Superi! et Divûm tu maxime rector,

Jupiter, Arcadii quæso miserescite regis,

Et patrias audite preces. Si numina vestra

Incolumem Pallanta mihi, si fata reservant,

Si visurus eum vivo, et venturus in unum,

Vitam oro; patiar quemvis durare laborem!

Sin aliquem infandum casum, Fortuna, minaris,

Nunc, O nunc liceat crudelem abrumpere vitam!

Dum curæ ambiguæ, dum spes incerta futuri;

Dum te, chare Pueri! mea sera et sola voluptas!

Amplexu teneo; gravior ne nuncius aures

Vulneret—

ÆN. VII. 572.



the pure sublime, not only have a little dependence on figures of speech, but, generally, reject them. The proper region of these ornaments is, where a moderate degree of elevation and passion is predominant; and there they contribute to the embellishment of discourse, only when there is a basis of solid thought and natural sentiment; when they are inserted in their proper place; and when they rise, of themselves, from the subject, without being sought after.

Having premised these observations, I proceed to give an account of the origin and nature of figures; principally of such as have their dependence on language; including that numerous tribe which the rhetoricians call tropes.

At the first rise of language, men would begin with giving names to the different objects which they discerned or thought of. This nomenclature would, at the beginning, be very narrow. According as men's ideas multiplied, and their acquaintance with objects increased, their stock of names and words would increase also. But to the infinite variety of objects and ideas no language is adequate. No language is so copious, as to have a separate word for every separate idea. Men naturally sought to abridge this labour of multiplying words *in infinitum*; and in order to lay less burden on their memories, made one word, which they had already appropriated to a certain

idea or object, stand also for some other idea or object, between which and the primary one, they found, or fancied some relation. Thus, the preposition *in* was originally invented to express the circumstance of place: "The man was killed *in* the wood." In progress of time, words were wanted to express men's being connected with certain conditions of fortune, or certain situations of mind; and some resemblance, or analogy, being fancied between these, and the place of bodies, the word *in* was employed to express men's being so circumstanced; as one's being *in* health, or *in* sickness, *in* prosperity, *in* adversity, *in* joy, or *in* grief, *in* doubt, or *in* danger, or *in* safety. Here we see this preposition *in* plainly assuming a tropical signification, or carried off from its original meaning, to signify something else, which relates to, or resembles it.

Tropes of this kind abound in all languages; and are plainly owing to the want of proper words. The operations of the mind and affections, in particular, are, in most languages, described by words taken from sensible objects. The reason is plain. The names of sensible objects were, in all languages, the words most early introduced; and were, by degrees, extended to those mental objects of which men had more obscure conceptions, and to which they found it more difficult to assign distinct names. They borrowed, therefore, the name of some sensible idea, where their imagina-

tion found some affinity. This we speak of a *piercing* judgment, and a *clear* head; a *soft* or a *hard* heart; a *rough* or a *smooth* behaviour. We say, *inflamed* by anger, *warmed* by love, *swelled* with pride, *melted* into grief; and these are almost the only significant words which we have for such ideas.

But, although the barrenness of language, and the want of words, be doubtless one cause of the invention of tropes; yet it is not the only, nor, perhaps, even the principal source of this form of speech. Tropes have arisen more frequently, and spread themselves wider, from the influence which imagination possesses over language. The train on which this has proceeded among all nations, I shall endeavour to explain.

Every object which makes any impression on the human mind, is constantly accompanied with certain circumstances and relations, that strike us at the same time. It never presents itself to our view, *isolé*, as the French express it; that is, independent on, and separated from, every other thing; but always occurs as somehow related to other objects; going before them, or following them; their effect or their cause; resembling them, or opposed to them; distinguished by certain qualities, or surrounded with certain circumstances. By this means, every idea or object carries in its train some other ideas, which may be considered

as its accessories. These accessories often strike the imagination more than the principal idea itself. They are, perhaps, more agreeable ideas ; or they are more familiar to our conceptions ; or they recall to our memory a greater variety of important circumstances. The imagination is more disposed to rest upon some of them ; and, therefore, instead of using the proper name of the principal idea which it means to express, it employs, in its place, the name of the accessory or correspondent idea ; although the principal have a proper and well-known name of its own. Hence a vast variety of tropical or figurative words obtain curren cy in all languages, through choice, not necessity ; and men of lively imaginations are every day adding to their number.

Thus, when we design to intimate the period at which a state enjoyed most reputation or glory, it were easy to employ the proper words for expressing this ; but as this is readily connected in our imagination, with the flourishing period of a plant or tree, we lay hold of this correspondent idea, and say, " The Roman empire flourished " most under Augustus." The leader of a faction is plain language ; but because the head is the principal part of the human body, and is supposed to direct all the animal operations, resting upon this resemblance, we say, " Cataline was the " head of the party." The word *voice* was origi-

nally invented to signify the articulate sound, formed by the organs of the mouth ; but, as by means of it men signify their ideas and their intentions to each other, *voice* soon assumed a great many other meanings, all derived from this primary effect. “ To give our voice” for any thing, signified, to give our sentiment in favour of it. Not only so ; but *voice* was transferred to signify any intimation of will or judgment, though given without the least interposition of voice in its literal sense, or any sound uttered at all. Thus we speak of listening to the *voice* of conscience, the *voice* of nature, the *voice* of God. This usage takes place, not so much from barrenness of language, or want of a proper word, as from an allusion which we choose to make to *voice*, in its primary sense, in order to convey our idea, connected with a circumstance which appears to the fancy to give it more sprightliness and force.

The account which I have now given, and which seems to be a full and fair one, of the introduction of tropes into all languages, coincides with what Cicero briefly hints in his third book *De Oratore*. “ *Modus transferendi verba late patet ; quam necessitas primum genuit, coacta inopia et angustias ; post autem delectatio, jucunditasque celebravit. Nam ut vestis, frigoris depellendi causa reperta primo, post adhiberi cœpta est ad ornatum etiam corporis et digni-*



“tatem, sic verbi translatio instituta est inopiæ  
“causa, frequentata, delectationis \*.”

From what has been said, it clearly appears, how that must come to pass, which I had occasion to mention in a former Lecture, that all languages are most figurative in their early state. Both the causes to which I ascribed the origin of figures, concur in producing this effect at the beginnings of society. Language is then most barren; the stock of proper names, which have been invented for things, is small; and, at the same time, imagination exerts great influence over the conceptions of men, and their method of uttering them; so that, both from necessity and from choice, their speech will, at that period, abound in tropes. For the savage tribes of men are always much given to wonder and astonishment. Every new object surprises, terrifies, and makes a strong impression on their mind; they are governed by imagination and passion more than by reason; and, of course, their speech must be deeply tinged by their genius. In fact, we find that this is the character of the American and Indian languages;

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\* “The figurative usage of words is very extensive; an usage  
“to which necessity first gave rise, on account of the paucity of  
“words, and barrenness of language; but which the pleasure  
“that was found in it afterwards rendered frequent. For, as  
“garments were first contrived to defend our bodies from the  
“cold, and afterwards were employed for the purpose of orna-  
“ment and dignity, so figures of speech, introduced by want,  
“were cultivated for the sake of entertainment.”

bold, picturesque, and metaphorical ; full of strong allusions to sensible qualities, and to such objects as struck them most in their wild and solitary life. An Indian chief makes a harangue to his tribe, in a style full of stronger metaphors than an European would use in an epic poem.

As language makes gradual progress towards refinement, almost every object comes to have a proper name given to it, and perspicuity and precision are more studied. But, still, for the reasons before given, borrowed words, or, as rhetoricians call them, tropes, must continue to occupy a considerable place. In every language, too, there are a multitude of words, which, though they were figurative in their first application to certain objects, yet, by long use, lose that figurative power wholly, and come to be considered as simple and literal expressions. In this case, are the terms which I remarked before, as transferred from sensible qualities, to the operations or qualities of the mind, a *piercing* judgment, a *clear* head, a *hard* heart, and the like. There are other words which remain in a sort of middle state ; which have neither lost wholly their figurative application, nor yet retain so much of it, as to imprint any remarkable character of figured language on our style ; such as these phrases, “ apprehend one’s meaning ;” “ enter on a subject ;” “ follow out an argument ;” “ stir up strife ;” and a great many more, of which our language is full. In the use of such phrases, correct writers will always

preserve a regard to the figure or allusion on which they are founded, and will be careful not to apply them in any way that is inconsistent with it. One may be "sheltered under the patronage of a great man;" but it were wrong to say, "sheltered under the masque of dissimulation;" as a masque conceals, but does not shelter. An object, in description, may be "clothed," if you will, with "epithets;" but it is not proper to speak of its being "clothed with circumstances;" as the word "circumstances" alludes to standing round, not to clothing. Such attentions as these, to the propriety of language, are requisite in every composition.

What has been said on this subject, tends to throw light on the nature of language in general; and will lead to the reasons why tropes or figures contribute to the beauty and grace of style.

First, They enrich language, and render it more copious. By their means, words and phrases are multiplied for expressing all sorts of ideas; for describing even the minutest differences; the nicest shades and colours of thought; which no language could possibly do by proper words alone, without assistance from tropes.

Secondly, They bestow dignity upon style. The familiarity of common words to which our ears are much accustomed, tends to degrade style. When we want to adapt our language to the tone of an elevated subject, we should be greatly at

a loss, if we could not borrow assistance from figures ; which, properly employed, have a similar effect on language, with what is produced by the rich and splendid dress of a person of rank, to create respect, and to give an air of magnificence to him who wears it. Assistance of this kind is often needed in prose compositions ; but poetry could not subsist without it. Hence figures form the constant language of poetry. To say, that “ the sun rises,” is trite and common ; but it becomes a magnificent image when expressed, as Mr Thomson has done :

But yonder comes the powerful king of day  
Rejoicing in the east.—

To say that “ all men are subject alike to death,” presents only a vulgar idea ; but it rises and fills the imagination, when painted thus by Horace :

Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede, pauperum tabernas  
Regumque tures.

Or,

Omnes eodem cogimur ; omnium  
Versatur urna, serius, ocyus,  
Sors exitura, et nos in eternum  
Exilium impositura cymbæ \*.

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\* With equal pace impartial fate,  
Knocks at the palace, as the cottage gate.

Or,

We all must tread the paths of fate ;  
And ever shakes the mortal urn,  
Whose lot embarks us, soon or late,  
On Charon's boat ; ah ! never to return. FRANCIS.

In the third place, figures give us the pleasure of enjoying two objects presented together to our view, without confusion; the principal idea, which is the subject of the discourse, along with its accessory, which gives it the figurative dress. We see one thing in another, as Aristotle expresses it; which is always agreeable to the mind. For there is nothing with which the fancy is more delighted, than with comparisons and resemblances of objects; and all tropes are founded upon some relation or analogy between one thing and another. When, for instance, in place of "youth," I say, the "morning of life;" the fancy is immediately entertained with all the resembling circumstances which presently occur between these two objects. At one moment, I have in my eye a certain period of human life, and a certain time of the day, so related to each other, that the imagination plays between them with pleasure, and contemplates two similar objects, in one view, without embarrassment or confusion. Not only so, but,

In the fourth place, figures are attended with this farther advantage of giving us frequently a much clearer and more striking view of the principal object, than if we could have it were expressed in simple terms, and divested of its accessory idea. This is, indeed, their principal advantage, in virtue of which, they are very properly said to illustrate a subject, or to throw light upon it. For they exhibit the object on which



they are employed, in a picturesque form, they can render an abstract conception, in some degree an object of sense ; they surround it with such circumstances as enable the mind to lay hold of it steadily, and to contemplate it fully. “ Those persons,” says one, “ who gain the hearts of most people, who are chosen as the companions of their softer hours, and their reliefs from anxiety and care, are seldom persons of shining qualities, or strong virtues : it is rather the soft green of the soul on which we rest our eyes, that are fatigued with beholding more glaring objects.” Here, by a happy allusion to a colour, the whole conception is conveyed clear and strong to the mind in one word. By a well chosen figure, even conviction is assisted, and the impression of a truth upon the mind made more lively and forcible than it would otherwise be. As in the following illustration of Dr Young’s : “ When we dip too deep in pleasure, we always stir a sediment that renders it impure and noxious ;” or in this, “ A heart boiling with violent passions, will always send up infatuating fumes to the head.” An image that presents so much congruity between a moral and a sensible idea, serves, like an argument from analogy, to enforce what the author asserts, and to induce belief.

Besides, whether we are endeavouring to raise sentiments of pleasure or aversion, we can always

heighten the emotion by the figures which we introduce ; leading the imagination to a train, either of agreeable or disagreeable, of exalting or debasing ideas, correspondent to the impression which we seek to make. When we want to render an object beautiful or magnificent, we borrow images from all the most beautiful or splendid scenes of nature ; we thereby naturally throw a lustre over our object ; we enliven the reader's mind, and dispose him to go along with us, in the gay and pleasing impressions which we give him of the subject. This effect of figures is happily touched in the following lines of Dr Akenside, and illustrated by a very sublime figure :

———Then the expressive strain  
Diffuses its enchantment. Fancy dreams  
Of sacred fountains and Elysian groves,  
And Vales of bliss ; the intellectual power  
Bends from his awful throne a wond'ring ear,  
And smiles.——— Pleas. of Imagination, I. 24.

What I have now explained concerning the use and effects of figures, naturally leads us to reflect on the wonderful power of language ; and, indeed, we cannot reflect on it without the highest admiration. What a fine vehicle is it now become for all the conceptions of the human mind ; even for the most subtile and delicate workings of the imagination ! What a pliant and flexible instrument in the hand of one who can employ it skilfully ; prepared to take every form which he chooses to

give it ! Not content with a simple communication of ideas and thoughts, it paints those ideas to the eye ; it gives colouring and relievo, even to the most abstract conceptions. In the figures which it uses, it sets mirrors before us, where we may behold objects, a second time, in their likeness. It entertains us, as with a succession of the most splendid pictures ; disposes, in the most artificial manner, of the light and shade, for viewing every thing to the best advantage ; in fine, from being a rude and imperfect interpreter of men's wants and necessities, it has now passed into an instrument of the most delicate and refined luxury.

To make these effects of figurative language sensible, there are few authors in the English language, whom I can refer to with more advantage than Mr Addison, whose imagination is at once remarkably rich, and remarkably correct and chaste. When he is treating, for instance, of the effect which light and colours have to entertain the fancy, considered in Mr Locke's view of them as secondary qualities, which have no real existence in matter, but are only ideas in the mind, with what beautiful painting has he adorned this philosophic speculation ! " Things," says he, " would make but a  
" poor appearance to the eye, if we saw them only  
" in their proper figures and motions. Now, we  
" are every where entertained with pleasing shows  
" and apparitions ; we discover imaginary glories  
" in the heavens, and in the earth, and see some

“ of this visionary beauty poured out upon the  
“ whole creation. But what a rough, unsightly  
“ sketch of nature should we be entertained with  
“ did all her colouring disappear, and the several  
“ distinctions of light and shade vanish ! In short,  
“ our souls are, at present, delightfully lost, and  
“ bewildered in a pleasing delusion, and we walk  
“ about like the enchanted hero of a romance,  
“ who sees beautiful castles, woods, and meadows ;  
“ and at the same time hears the warbling of birds,  
“ and the purling of streams ; but upon the finish-  
“ ing of some secret spell, the fantastic scene  
“ breaks up, and the disconsolate knight finds  
“ himself on a barren heath, or in a solitary desert.  
“ It is not improbable that something like this  
“ may be the state of the soul, after its first sepa-  
“ ration, in respect of the images it will receive  
“ from matter.” No. 413. Spec.

Having thus explained, at sufficient length, the origin, the nature, and the effects of tropes, I should proceed next to the several kinds and divisions of them. But, in treating of these, were I to follow the common track of the scholastic writers on rhetoric, I should soon become tedious, and I apprehend, useless, at the same time. Their great business has been, with a most patient and frivolous industry, to branch them out under a vast number of divisions, according to all the several modes in which a word may be carried from its literal meaning, into one that is figurative, with-

out doing any more; as if the mere knowledge of the names and classes of all the tropes that can be formed, could be of any advantage towards the proper or graceful use of language. All that I propose is, to give, in a few words, before finishing this Lecture, a general view of the several sources whence the tropical meaning of words is derived; after which I shall, in subsequent Lectures, descend to a more particular consideration of some of the most considerable figures of speech, and such as are in most frequent use; by treating of which, I shall give all the instruction I can concerning the proper employment of figurative language, and point out the errors and abuses which are apt to be committed in this part of style.

All tropes, as I before observed, are founded on the relation which one object bears to another; in virtue of which, the name of the one can be substituted instead of the name of the other; and by such a substitution, the vivacity of the idea is commonly meant to be increased. These relations, some more, some less intimate, may all give rise to tropes. One of the first and most obvious relations is, that between a cause and its effect. Hence, in figurative language, the cause is sometimes put for the effect. Thus Mr Addison, writing of Italy:

Blossoms, and fruits, and flowers, together rise,  
And the whole year in gay confusion lies:



where the "whole year" is plainly intended to signify the effects or productions of all the seasons of the year. At other times, again, the effect is put for the cause; as "grey hairs" frequently for old age, which causes grey hairs; and "shade," for trees that produce the shade. The relation between the container and the thing contained, is also so intimate and obvious as naturally to give rise to tropes:

————— Ille impiger hausit  
Spumantem pateram, et pleno se proluit auro.

Where every one sees that the cup and the gold are put for the liquor that was contained in the golden cup. In the same manner, the name of any country is often used to denote the inhabitants of that country; and Heaven very commonly employed to signify God, because he is conceived as dwelling in Heaven. To implore the assistance of Heaven, is the same as to implore the assistance of God. The relation betwixt any established sign and the thing signified, is a further source of tropes. Hence,

Cedant arma togæ; concedat laurea linguæ.

The "toga," being the badge of the civil professions, and the "laurel," of military honours, the badge of each is put for the civil and military characters themselves. To "assume the sceptre," is a common phrase for entering on royal authority. To tropes, founded on these several relations of

cause and effect, container and contained, sign and thing signified, is given the name of Metonymy.

When the trope is founded on the relation between an antecedent and a consequent, or what goes before, and immediately follows, it is then called a metalepsis; as in the Roman phrase of "Fuit," or "Vixit," to express that one was dead. "Fuit Ilium et ingens gloria Dardanidum," signifies, that the glory of Troy is now no more.

When the whole is put for a part, or a part for the whole; a genus for a species, or a species for a genus; the singular for the plural, or the plural for the singular number; in general, when any thing less, or any thing more, is put for the precise object meant; the figure is then called a synecdoche. It is very common, for instance, to describe a whole object by some remarkable part of it; as, when we say, "A fleet of so many sail," in the place of "ships;" when we use the "head" for the "person," the "pole" for the "earth," the "waves" for the "sea." In like manner, an attribute may be put for a subject; as "youth and beauty," for "the young and beautiful;" and sometimes a subject for its attribute. But it is needless to insist longer on this enumeration, which serves little purpose. I have said enough to give an opening into that great variety of relations between objects, by means of which the

mind is assisted to pass easily from one to another ; and by the name of the one understands the other to be meant. It is always some accessory idea which recalls the principal to the imagination ; and commonly recalls it with more force, than if the principal idea had been expressed.

The relation which is far the most fruitful of tropes, I have not yet mentioned ; that is, the relation of similitude and resemblance. On this is founded what is called the metaphor ; when, in place of using the proper name of any object, we employ, in its place, the name of some other which is like it ; which is a sort of picture of it, and which thereby awakens the conception of it, with more force or grace. This figure is more frequent than all the rest put together ; and the language, both of prose and verse, owes to it much of its elegance and grace. This, therefore, deserves very full and particular consideration ; and shall be the subject of the next Lecture.

## LECTURE XV.

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### METAPHOR.

**AFTER** the preliminary observations I have made relating to figurative language in general, I come now to treat separately of such figures of speech as occur most frequently, and require particular attention ; and I begin with metaphor. This is a figure founded entirely on the resemblance which one object bears to another. Hence it is much allied to simile, or comparison ; and is indeed no other than a comparison, expressed in an abridged form. When I say of some great minister, “ that he upholds the state, like a pillar, which supports the weight of a whole edifice,” I fairly make a comparison ; but when I say of such a minister, “ that he is the pillar of the state,” it is now become a metaphor. The comparison betwixt the minister and a pillar is made in the mind ; but is expressed without any of the words that denote comparison. The comparison is only insinuated, not expressed ; the one object is supposed to be so

like the other, that, without formally drawing the comparison, the name of the one may be put in the place of the name of the other. "The minister is the pillar of the state." This, therefore, is a more lively and animated manner of expressing the resemblances which imagination traces among objects. There is nothing which delights the fancy more than this act of comparing things together, discovering resemblances between them, and describing them by their likeness. The mind, thus employed, is exercised without being fatigued; and is gratified with the consciousness of its own ingenuity. We need not be surprised, therefore, at finding all language tingured strongly with metaphor. It insinuates itself even into familiar conversation; and unsought, rises up of its own accord in the mind. The very words which I have casually employed in describing this, are a proof of what I say; *tingured, insinuates, rises up*, are all of them metaphorical expressions, borrowed from some resemblance which fancy forms between sensible objects and the internal operations of the mind; and yet the terms are no less clear, and, perhaps, more expressive, than if words had been used, which were to be taken in the strict and literal sense.

Though all metaphor imports comparison, and therefore is, in that respect, a figure of thought; yet, as the words in a metaphor are not taken literally, but changed from their proper to a figu-



rative sense, the metaphor is commonly ranked among tropes or figures of words. But, provided the nature of it be well understood, it signifies very little whether we call it a figure or a trope. I have confined it to the expression of resemblance between two objects. I must remark, however, that the word metaphor is sometimes used, in a looser and more extended sense, for the application of a term in any figurative signification, whether the figure be founded on resemblance, or on some other relation which two objects bear to one another. For instance, when grey hairs are put for old age, “to bring one’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave;” some writers would call this a metaphor, though it is not properly one, but what rhetoricians call a metonymy; that is, the effect put for the cause; “grey hairs” being the effect of old age, but not bearing any sort of resemblance to it. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, uses metaphor in this extended sense, for any figurative meaning imposed upon a word; as a whole put for the part, or a part for a whole; the species for the genus, or a genus for the species. But it would be unjust to tax this most acute writer with any inaccuracy on this account; the minute subdivisions, and various names of tropes, being unknown in his days, and the invention of later rhetoricians. Now, however, when these divisions are established, it is inaccurate to call every figurative use of terms, promiscuously, a metaphor.

Of all the figures of speech, none comes so near to painting as metaphor. Its peculiar effect is to give light and strength to description ; to make intellectual ideas, in some sort, visible to the eye, by giving them colour, and substance, and sensible qualities. In order to produce this effect, however, a delicate hand is required ; for, by a very little inaccuracy, we are in hazard of introducing confusion, in place of promoting perspicuity. Several rules, therefore, are necessary to be given for the proper management of metaphors. But, before entering on these, I shall give one instance of a very beautiful metaphor, that I may shew the figure to full advantage. I shall take my instance from Lord Bolingbroke's Remarks on the History of England. Just at the conclusion of his work, he is speaking of the behaviour of Charles I. to his last parliament : " In " a word," says he, " about a month after their " meeting, he dissolved them ; and, as soon as he " had dissolved them, he repented ; but he repented too late of his rashness. Well might he " repent, for the vessel was now full, and this last " drop made the waters of bitterness overflow." " Here," he adds, " we draw the curtain, and put " an end to our remarks." Nothing could be more happily thrown off. The metaphor, we see is continued through several expressions. The *vessel* is put for the state or temper of the nation already *full*, that is, provoked to the highest by former oppressions and wrongs ; this *last drop*,

stands for the provocation recently received by the abrupt dissolution of the parliament; and the *overflowing of the waters of bitterness*, beautifully expresses all the effects of resentment let loose by an exasperated people.

On this passage we may make two remarks in passing. The one, that nothing forms a more spirited and dignified conclusion of a subject, than a figure of this kind happily placed at the close. We see the effect of it in this instance. The author goes off with a good grace; and leaves a strong and full impression of his subject on the reader's mind. My other remark is, the advantage which a metaphor frequently has above a formal comparison. How much would the sentiment here have been enfeebled, if it had been expressed in the style of a regular simile, thus: "Well might he repent; for the state of the nation, loaded with grievances and provocations, resembled a vessel that was now full, and this superadded provocation, like the last drop infused, made their rage and resentment, as waters of bitterness overflow." It has infinitely more spirit and force as it now stands, in the form of a metaphor. "Well might he repent; for the vessel was now full; and this last drop made the waters of bitterness overflow."

Having mentioned, with applause, this instance from Lord Bolingbroke, I think it incumbent on

me here to take notice, that though I may have recourse to this author sometimes for examples of style, it is his style only, and not his sentiments, that deserve praise. It is, indeed, my opinion, that there are few writings in the English language, which, for the matter contained in them, can be read with less profit or fruit than Lord Bolingbroke's works. His political writings have the merit of a very lively and eloquent style; but they have no other; being, as to the substance, the mere temporary productions of faction and party; no better, indeed, than pamphlets written for the day. His Posthumous, or, as they are called, his Philosophical Works, wherein he attacks religion, have still less merit; for they are as loose in the style as they are flimsy in the reasoning. An unhappy instance, this author is, of parts and genius so miserably perverted by faction and passion, that as his memory will descend to posterity with little honour, so his productions will soon pass, and are, indeed, already passing into neglect and oblivion.

Returning from this digression to the subject before us, I proceed to lay down the rules to be observed in the conduct of metaphors; and which are much the same for tropes of every kind.

The first which I shall mention is, that they be suited to the nature of the subject of which we treat; neither too many, nor too gay, nor too elevated for it; that we neither attempt to force



the subject, by means of them, into a degree of elevation which is not congruous to it; nor, on the other hand, allow it to sink below its proper dignity. This is a direction which belongs to all figurative language, and should be ever kept in view. Some metaphors are allowable, nay beautiful in poetry, which it would be absurd and unnatural to employ in prose; some may be graceful in orations, which would be very improper in historical or philosophical composition. We must remember, that figures are the dress of our sentiments. As there is a natural congruity between dress and the character or rank of the person who wears it, a violation of which congruity never fails to hurt; the same holds precisely as to the application of figures to sentiment. The excessive or unseasonable employment of them is mere foppery in writing. It gives a boyish air to composition; and, instead of raising a subject, in fact diminishes its dignity. For, as in life, true dignity must be founded on character, not on dress and appearance, so the dignity of composition must arise from sentiment and thought, not from ornament. The affectation and parade of ornament, detract as much from an author, as they do from a man. Figures and metaphors, therefore, should, on no occasion, be stuck on too profusely; and never should be such as refuse to accord with the strain of our sentiment. Nothing can be more unnatural, than for a writer to carry on a train of reasoning, in the same sort of figurative language which he would use in description. When he reasons, we look



only for perspicuity ; when he describes, we expect embellishment ; when he divides or relates, we desire plainness and simplicity. One of the greatest secrets in composition is, to know when to be simple. This always gives a heightening to ornament in its proper place. The right disposition of the shade makes the light and colouring strike the more: " *Is enim est eloquens,*" says Cicero, " *qui et humilia subtiliter, et magna graviter, et mediocria temperate potest dicere. Nam qui nihil potest tranquille, nihil leniter, nihil define, distincte, potest dicere, is, cum non præparatis auribus inflammare rem cœpit, furere apud sanos, et quasi inter sobrios bacchari temulentus videtur\*.*" This admonition should be particularly attended to by young practitioners in the art of writing, who are apt to be carried away by an undistinguishing admiration of what is showy and florid, whether in its place or not †.

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\* " He is truly eloquent who can discourse of humble subjects in a plain style, who can treat important ones with dignity, and speak of things which are of a middle nature, in a temperate strain. For one who, upon no occasion, can express himself in a calm, orderly, distinct manner, when he begins to be on fire before his readers are prepared to kindle along with him, has the appearance of raving like a madman, among persons who are in their senses, or of reeling like a drunkard, in the midst of sober company."

† What person of the least taste can bear the following passage in a late historian? He is giving an account of the famous act of parliament against irregular marriages in England: " The

The second rule which I give, respects the choice of objects from whence metaphors, and other figures, are to be drawn. The field for figurative language is very wide. All nature, to speak in the style of figure, opens its stores to us, and admits us to gather, from all sensible objects, whatever can illustrate intellectual or moral ideas. Not only the gay and splendid objects of sense, but the grave, the terrifying, and even the gloomy and dismal, may, on different occasions, be introduced into figures with propriety. But we must beware of ever using such allusions as raise in the mind disagreeable, mean, vulgar, or dirty ideas. Even when metaphors are chosen in order to vilify and degrade any object, an author should study never to be nauseous in his allusions. Cicero blames an orator of his time, for terming his enemy "*Stercus Curiae*; quamvis sit simile," says he, "*ta-men est deformis cogitatio similitudinis*." But, in subjects of dignity, it is an unpardonable fault to

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"bill," says he, "underwent a great number of alterations and amendments, which were not effected without violent contest." This is plain language suited to the subject; and we naturally expect, that he should go on in the same strain to tell us, that after these contests, it was carried by a great majority of voices, and obtained the royal assent. But how does he express himself in finishing the period? "At length, however, it was floated through both houses on the side of a great majority, and steered into the safe harbour of royal approbation." Nothing can be more puerile than such language. Smollet's History of England, as quoted in Critical Review for Oct. 1751, p. 251.

introduce mean and vulgar metaphors. In the treatise on the Art of Sinking, in Dean Swift's works, there is a full and humorous collection of instances of this kind, wherein authors, instead of exalting, have contrived to degrade their subjects by the figures they employed. Authors of greater note than those which are there quoted, have at times fallen into this error. Archbishop Tillotson, for instance, is sometimes negligent in his choice of metaphors; as, when speaking of the day of judgment, he describes the world, as "cracking about the sinner's ears." Shakespeare, whose imagination was rich and bold, in a much greater degree than it was delicate, often fails here. The following, for example, is a gross transgression; in his *Henry V.* having mentioned a dunghill, he presently raises a metaphor from the steam of it; and on a subject too, that naturally led to much nobler ideas :

And those that leave their valiant bones in France,  
Dying like men, though buried in your dunghills,  
They shall be famed; for there the sun shall greet them,  
And draw their honours reeking up to heaven.

Act IV. Sc. 8.

In the third place, as metaphors should be drawn from objects of some dignity, so particular care should be taken that the resemblance, which is the foundation of the metaphor, be clear and perspicuous, not far-fetched, nor difficult to dis-

cover. The transgression of this rule makes, what are called harsh or forced metaphors, which are always displeasing because they puzzle the reader, and instead of illustrating the thought, render it as perplexed and intricate. With metaphors of this kind Cowley abounds. He, and some of the writers of his age, seem to have considered it as the perfection of wit, to hit upon likenesses between objects which no other person could have discovered; and at the same time, to pursue those metaphors so far, that it requires some ingenuity to follow them out and comprehend them. This makes a metaphor resemble an ænigma; and is the very reverse of Cicero's rule on this head: "Verecunda debet esse translatio; ut deducta esse in alienum locum non irruisse, atque ut voluntario non vi venisse videatur\*." How forced and obscure, for instance, are the following verses of Cowley, speaking of his mistress:

Wo to her stubborn heart, if once mine come  
 Into the self-same room,  
 'Twill tear and blow up all within,  
 Like a grenada shot into a magazine.  
 Then shall love keep the ashes and torn parts  
 Of both our broken hearts;

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\* "Every metaphor should be modest, so that it may carry the appearance of having been led, not of having forced itself, into the place of that word whose room it occupies; that it may seem to have come thither of its own accord, and not by constraint." De Oratore, lib. iii. c. 53.



Shall out of both one new one make ;  
 From her's th' alloy, from mine the metal take ;  
 For of her heart, he from the flames will find  
 But little left behind :

Mine only will remain entire,  
 No dross was there to perish in the fire.

In this manner he addresses sleep :

In vain, thou drowsy god, I thee invoke,  
 For thou who dost from fumes arise,  
 Thou who man's soul dost overshadow  
 With a thick cloud by vapours made ;  
 Canst have no power to shut his eyes,  
 Whose flame's so pure, that it sends up no smoke :  
 Yet how do tears but from some vapours rise,  
 Tears that bewinter all my year ;  
 The fate of Egypt I sustain.  
 And never feel the dew of rain,  
 From clouds which in the head appear.  
 But all my too much moisture owe  
 To overflowings of the heart below \*.

**Trite and common resemblances should indeed be avoided in our Metaphors. To be new, and not vulgar is a beauty. But when they are fetched from some likeness too remote, and lying too far out of the road of ordinary thought, then besides their obscurity, they have also the disadvantage of appearing laboured, and, as the French call it,**

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\* See an excellent criticism on this sort of metaphysical poetry, in Dr Johnson's Life of Cowley.



“ *recherché* ;” whereas metaphor, like every other ornament, loses its whole grace, when it does not seem natural and easy.

It is but a bad and ungraceful softening, which writers sometimes use for a harsh metaphor, when they palliate it with the expression, *as it were*. This is but an awkward parenthesis ; and metaphors which need this apology of an *as it were*, would, generally, have been better omitted. Metaphors, too, borrowed from any of the sciences, especially such of them as belong to particular professions, are almost always faulty by their obscurity.

In the fourth place, it must be carefully attended to, in the conduct of metaphors, never to jumble metaphorical and plain language together ; never to construct a period so, that part of it must be understood metaphorically, part literally : which always produces a most disagreeable confusion. Instances, which are but too frequent, even in good authors, will make this rule, and the reason of it, be clearly understood. In Mr Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*, Penelope, bewailing the abrupt departure of her son Telemachus, is made to speak thus :

Long to my joys, my dearest lord is lost,  
His country's buckler, and the Grecian boast ;

Now from my fond embrace by tempests torn,  
Our other column of the state is borne,  
Nor took a kind adieu, nor sought consent \*.

IV. 962.

Here, in one line, her son is figured as a column; and in the next, he returns to be a person, to whom it belongs to take adieu, and to ask consent. This is inconsistent. The poet should either have kept himself to the idea of man, in the literal sense; or if he figured him by a column, he should have ascribed nothing to him but what belonged to it. He was not at liberty to ascribe to that column the actions and properties of a man. Such unnatural mixtures render the image indistinct; leaving it to waver, in our conception, between the figurative and the literal sense. Horace's rule, which he applies to characters, should be observed by all writers who deal in figures:

— Servetur ad imum,  
Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.

Mr Pope, elsewhere, addressing himself to the king, says,

\* In the original, there is no allusion to a column, and the metaphor is regularly supported:

Η πρην μιν ποσιν ἑσθλοὶ ἀπάμιστα θεμολιοῦντα  
Παντοίῃς ἀρετῇσι κεκασμένοι ἐν Δαναοῖσι  
Εσθλόν, τὲ κλειὸς ἔργον καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μίσην Ἀργεῖ·  
Νοῦ δ' αὖ παιδ' ἀγαπήσειν ἀπαιτῆσαι το θυίλλαι  
Ἀκλεα ἔκ μενγαρεὶ ἐδ' ὀρμηθεὶς ἀπασα.

Δ. 734.

To thee the world its present homage pays,  
The harvest early, but mature the praise.

This, though not so gross, is a fault, however, of the same kind. It is plain, that, had not the rhyme misled him to the choice of an improper phrase, he would have said,

The harvest early, but mature the crop :

And so would have continued the figure which he had begun. Whereas, by dropping it unfinished, and by employing the literal word *praise*, when we were expecting something that related to the harvest, the figure is broken, and the two members of the sentence have no proper correspondence with each other :

The *harvest* early, but mature the *praise*.

The works of Ossian abound with beautiful and correct metaphors : such as that on a hero : “ In  
“ peace, thou art the gale of spring ; in war, the  
“ mountain storm.” Or this, on a woman :  
“ She was covered with the light of beauty ; but  
“ her heart was the house of pride.” They afford, however, one instance of the fault we are now censuring : “ Trothal went forth with the  
“ stream of his people, but they met a rock :  
“ for Fingal stood unmoved ; broken they rolled  
“ back from his side : nor did they roll in safety ;  
“ the spear of the king pursued their flight.” At the beginning, the metaphor is very beautiful.

The stream, the unmoved rock, the waves rolling back broken, are expressions employed in the proper and consistent language of figure; but in the end, when we are told, "they did not roll in safety, because the spear of the king pursued their flight," the literal meaning is improperly mixed with the metaphor; they are, at one and the same time, presented to us as *waves* that *roll*, and men that may be *pursued* and *wounded with a spear*. If it be faulty to jumble together, in this manner, metaphorical and plain language, it is still more so,

In the fifth place, to make two different metaphors meet on one object. This is what is called mixed metaphor, and is indeed one of the grossest abuses of this figure; such as Shakespeare's expression, "to take arms against a sea of troubles." This makes a most unnatural medley, and confounds the imagination entirely. Quintilian has sufficiently guarded us against it. "Id imprimis est custodiendum, ut quo genere cœperis translationis, hoc finias. Multi autem cum initium a tempestate sumserunt, incendio aut ruina finiunt; quæ est inconsequentia rerum foedissima\*." Observe, for instance, what an

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\* "We must be particularly attentive to end with the same kind of metaphor with which we have begun. Some, when they begin the figure with a tempest, conclude it with a conflagration; which forms a shameful inconsistency."

inconsistent groupe of objects is brought together by Shakespeare, in the following passage of the *Tempest*; speaking of persons recovering their judgment after the enchantment which held them was dissolved :

—The charm dissolves apace,  
And as the morning steals upon the night,  
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses  
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle  
Their clearer reason.—

So many ill-sorted things are here joined, that the mind can see nothing clearly; the morning *stealing* upon the darkness, and at the same time *melting* it; the senses of men *chasing fumes*, *ignorant fumes*, and *fumes that mantle*. So again in *Romeo and Juliet* :

—As glorious  
As is a winged messenger from heaven,  
Unto the white upturn'd wondering eyes  
Of mortals, that fall back to gaze on him,  
When he bestrides the lazy pacing clouds,  
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

Here, the angel is represented as, at one moment, *bestriding* the clouds, and *sailing* upon the air; and upon the *bosom* of the air too; which forms such a confused picture, that it is impossible for any imagination to comprehend it.

More correct writers than Shakespeare sometimes fall into this error of mixing metaphors.



It is surprising how the following inaccuracy should have escaped Mr Addison in his letter from Italy :

I bridle in my struggling Muse with pain,  
That longs to launch into a bolder strain \*.

The Muse, figured as a horse, may be *bridled*; but when we speak of *launching*, we make it a ship; and by no force of imagination, can it be supposed both a horse and a ship at one moment; *bridled*, to hinder it from *launching*. The same author, in one of his numbers in the Spectator, says, "There is not a single view of human nature, which is not sufficient to extinguish the seeds of pride." Observe the incoherence of the things here joined together, making "a view extinguish, and extinguish seeds."

Horace, also, is incorrect, in the following passage :

Urit enim fulgore suo qui prægravat artes

Infra se positas. —

*Urit qui prægravat.*—He dazzles who bears down with his weight; makes plainly an inconsistent mixture of metaphorical ideas. Neither can this other passage be altogether vindicated:

\* In my observation on this passage, I find, that I had coincided with Dr Johnson, who passes a similar censure upon it in his life of Addison.

Ah ! quantà laboras in Charybdi,  
Digne puer, meliore flammâ !

Where a whirlpool of water, Charybdis, is said to be a flame, not good enough for this young man ; meaning, that he was unfortunate in the object of his passion. Flame is, indeed, become almost a literal word for the passion of love ; but as it still retains, in some degree, its figurative power, it should never have been used as synonymous with water, and mixed with it in the same metaphor. When Mr Pope (Eloisa to Abelard) says,

All then is full, possessing and possest,  
No craving void left aking in the breast ;

A *void* may, metaphorically, be said to *crave* ; but can a void be said to *ake* ?

A good rule has been given for examining the propriety of metaphors, when we doubt whether or not they be of the mixed kind ; namely, that we should try to form a picture upon them, and consider how the parts would agree, and what sort of figure the whole would present, when delineated with a pencil. By this means we should become sensible, whether inconsistent circumstances were mixed, and a monstrous image thereby produced, as in all those faulty instances I have now been giving ; or whether the object was, all along, presented in one natural and consistent point of view.

As metaphors ought never to be mixed, so, in the sixth place, we should avoid crowding them together on the same object. Supposing each of the metaphors to be preserved distinct, yet, if they be heaped on one another, they produce a confusion somewhat of the same kind with the mixed metaphor. We may judge of this by the following passage from Horace :

Motum ex Metello consule civicum,

Bellique causas, et vitia, et modos,

Ludumque fortunæ, gravesque

Principum amicitias, et arma

Nondum expiatis uncta cruoribus,

Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ

Tractas, et incedis per ignes

Suppositos cineri doloso \*.

Lib. II. 1.

This passage, though very poetical, is, however, harsh and obscure ; owing to no other cause but this, that three distinct metaphors are crowded

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\* Of warm commotions, wrathful jars,

The growing seeds of civil wars ;

Of double fortune's cruel games,

The specious means, the private aims,

And fatal friendships of the guilty great,

Alas ! how fatal to the Roman state !

Of mighty legions late subdu'd,

And arms with Latian blood embru'd ;

Yet unatoned, a labour vast,

Doubtful the die, and dire the cast !

You treat adventurous, and incautious tread

On fires with faithless embers overspread. FRANCIS.

together, to describe the difficulty of Pollio's writing a history of the civil wars. First, "Tractas arma uncta, cruoribus nondum expiatis;" next, "Opus plenum periculosæ aleæ;" and then, "Incedis per ignes suppositos doloso cineri." The mind has difficulty in passing readily through so many different views given it, in quick succession, of the same object.

The only other rule concerning metaphors, which I shall add, in the seventh place, is, that they be not too far pursued. If the resemblance, on which the figure is founded, be long dwelt upon, and carried into all its minute circumstances, we make an allegory instead of a metaphor; we tire the reader, who soon becomes weary of this play of fancy; and we render our discourse obscure. This is called, straining a metaphor. Cowley deals in this to excess; and to this error is owing, in a great measure, that intricacy and harshness, in his figurative language, which I before remarked. Lord Shaftesbury is sometimes guilty of pursuing his metaphors too far. Fond, to a high degree, of every decoration of style, when once he had hit upon a figure that pleased him, he was extremely loth to part with it. Thus, in his Advice to an Author, having taken up soliloquy, or meditation, under the metaphor of a proper method of evacuation for an author, he pursues this metaphor through several pages, under all the forms "of discharging crudities, throwing off



“ froth and scum, bodily operation, taking physic, curing indigestion, giving vent to choler, bile, flatulencies, and tumours ;” till, at last, the idea becomes nauseous. Dr Young also often trespasses in the same way. The merit, however, of this writer, in figurative language, is great, and deserves to be remarked. No writer, ancient or modern, had a stronger imagination than Dr Young, or one more fertile in figures of every kind. His metaphors are often new, and often natural and beautiful. But his imagination was strong and rich, rather than delicate and correct. Hence, in his Night Thoughts, there prevails an obscurity, and a hardness in his style. The metaphors are frequently too bold, and frequently too far pursued ; the reader is dazzled rather than enlightened ; and kept constantly on the stretch to keep pace with the author. We may observe, for instance, how the following metaphor is spun out :

Thy thoughts are vagabond ; all outward-bound,  
Midst sands and rocks, and storms, to cruise for pleasure ;  
If gain'd, dear bought ; and better miss'd than gain'd.  
Fancy and sense, from an infected shore,  
Thy cargo brings ; and pestilence the prize :  
Then such the thirst, insatiable thirst,  
By fond indulgence but inflamed the more  
Fancy still cruises, when poor sense is tired.

Speaking of old age, he says it should

Walk thoughtful on the silent solemn shore  
Of that vast ocean it must sail so soon,



And put good works on board, and wait the wind.  
That shortly blows us into worlds unknown.

The two first lines are uncommonly beautiful; "walk thoughtful on the silent," &c.; but when he continues the metaphor, "to putting good works on board, and waiting the wind," it plainly becomes strained, and sinks in dignity. Of all the English authors, I know none so happy in his metaphors as Mr Addison. His imagination was neither so rich nor so strong as Dr Young's, but far more chaste and delicate. Perspicuity, natural grace, and ease, always distinguish his figures. They are neither harsh nor strained; they never appear to have been studied or sought after; but seem to rise of their own accord from the subject, and constantly embellish it.

I have now treated fully of the metaphor, and the rules that should govern it; a part of style so important, that it required particular illustration. I have only to add a few words concerning allegory.

An Allegory may be regarded as a continued metaphor; as it is the representation of some one thing by another that resembles it, and that is made to stand for it. Thus, in Prior's *Henry and Emma*, Emma, in the following allegorical manner, describes her constancy to Henry.

Did I but propose to embark with thee  
On the smooth surface of a summer's sea,  
While gentle zephyrs play with prosperous gales,  
And fortune's favour fills the swelling sails,  
But would forsake the ship, and make the shore,  
When the winds whistle, and the tempests roar?

We may take also from the Scriptures a very fine example of an allegory, in the 80th Psalm; where the people of Israel are represented under the image of a vine, and the figure is supported throughout with great correctness and beauty: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt, thou  
" hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou  
" preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to  
" take deep root, and it filled the land. The  
" hills were covered with the shadow of it; and  
" the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.  
" She sent out her boughs into the sea, and her  
" branches into the river. Why hast thou broken  
" down her hedges, so that all they which pass by  
" the way do pluck her? The boar out of the  
" wood doth waste it; and the wild beasts of the  
" field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee,  
" O God of Hosts; look down from heaven, and  
" behold, and visit this vine!" Here there is no circumstance (except perhaps one phrase at the beginning, "thou hast cast out the heathen") that does not strictly agree to a vine, whilst at the same time the whole quadrates happily with the Jewish state represented by this figure. This is the first and principal requisite in the conduct of

an allegory, that the figurative and the literal meaning be not mixed inconsistently together. For instance, instead of describing the vine, as wasted by the boar from the wood, and devoured by the wild beast of the field, had the Psalmist said, it was afflicted by heathens, or overcome by enemies (which is the real meaning), this would have ruined the allegory, and produced the same confusion, of which I gave examples in metaphors, when the figurative and literal sense are mixed and jumbled together. Indeed, the same rules that were given for metaphors, may also be applied to allegories, on account of the affinity they bear to each other. The only material difference between them, besides the one being short, and the other being prolonged, is, that a metaphor always explains itself by the words that are connected with it in their proper and natural meaning; as when I say, "Achilles was a lion;" an "able minister is the pillar of the state;" my lion and my pillar are sufficiently interpreted by the mention of Achilles and the minister, which I join to them; but an allegory is, or may be, allowed to stand more disconnected with the literal meaning; the interpretation not so directly pointed out, but left to our own reflection.

Allegories were a favourite method of delivering instructions in ancient times: for what we call fables or parables are no other than allegories; where, by words and actions attributed to beasts

or inanimate objects, the dispositions of men are figured; and what we call the moral, is the unfigured sense or meaning of the allegory. An ænigma or riddle is also a species of allegory; one thing represented or imagined by another, but purposely wrapt up under so many circumstances, as to be rendered obscure. Where a riddle is not intended, it is always a fault in allegory to be too dark. The meaning should be easily seen through the figure employed to shadow it. However, the proper mixture of light and shade in such compositions, the exact adjustment of all the figurative circumstances with the literal sense, so as neither to lay the meaning too bare and open, nor to cover and wrap it up too much, has ever been found an affair of great nicety; and there are few species of composition in which it is more difficult to write so as to please and command attention, than in allegories. In some of the visions of the Spectator, we have examples of allegories very happily executed.

## LECTURE XVI.

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### HYPERBOLE—PERSONIFICATION—APOSTROPHE.

**T**HE next figure concerning which I am to treat is called hyperbole, or exaggeration. It consists in magnifying an object beyond its natural bounds. It may be considered sometimes as a trope, and sometimes as a figure of thought: and here indeed the distinction between these two classes begins not to be clear, nor is it of any importance that we should have recourse to metaphysical subtilties, in order to keep them distinct. Whether we call it trope or figure, it is plain that it is a mode of speech which hath some foundation in nature. For in all languages, even in common conversation, hyperbolical expressions very frequently occur; as swift as the wind; as white as the snow, and the like: and our common forms of compliment are almost all of them extravagant hyperboles. If any thing be remarkably good or great in its kind, we are instantly ready to add to it some exaggerating epithet; and



to make it the greatest or best we ever saw. The imagination has always a tendency to gratify itself, by magnifying its present object, and carrying it to excess. More or less of this hyperbolical turn will prevail in language, according to the liveliness of imagination among the people who speak it. Hence young people always deal much in hyperboles. Hence the language of the Orientals was far more hyperbolical than that of the Europeans, who are of more phlegmatic, or, if you please, of more correct imagination. Hence, among all writers in early times, and in the rude periods of society, we may expect this figure to abound. Greater experience, and more cultivated society, abate the warmth of imagination, and chasten the manner of expression.

The exaggerated expressions to which our ears are accustomed in conversation, scarcely strike us as hyperboles. In an instant we make the proper abatement, and understand them according to their just value. But when there is something striking and unusual in the form of a hyperbolical expression, it then rises into a figure of speech which draws our attention : and here it is necessary to observe, that unless the reader's imagination be in such a state as disposes it to rise and swell along with the hyperbolical expression, he is always hurt and offended by it. For a sort of disagreeable force is put upon him ; he is required to strain and exert his fancy, when he feels no inclination to

make any such effort. Hence the hyperbole is a figure of difficult management ; and ought neither to be frequently used, nor long dwelt upon. On some occasions, it is undoubtedly proper, being, as was before observed, the natural style of a sprightly and heated imagination : but when hyperboles are unseasonable, or too frequent, they render a composition frigid and unaffecting. They are the resource of an author of feeble imagination ; of one, describing objects which either want native dignity in themselves, or whose dignity he cannot shew by describing them simply, and in their just proportions, and is therefore obliged to rest upon tumid and exaggerated expressions.

Hyperboles are of two kinds ; either such as are employed in description, or such as are suggested by the warmth of passion. The best, by far, are those which are the effect of passion : for, if the imagination has a tendency to magnify its objects beyond their natural proportion, passion possesses this tendency in a vastly stronger degree ; and therefore not only excuses the most daring figures, but very often renders them natural and just. All passions, without exception, love, terror, amazement, indignation, anger, and even grief, throw the mind into confusion, aggravate their objects, and of course prompt a hyperbolical style. Hence the following sentiments of Satan in Milton, as strongly as they are described, contain nothing but what is natural and proper ; exhibiting the picture of a mind agitated with rage and despair :

Me, miserable ! which way shall I fly  
 Infinite wrath and infinite despair ?  
 Which way I fly is hell, myself am hell,  
 And in the lowest depth ; a lower deep,  
 Still threat'ning to devour me, opens wide,  
 To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.

B. iv. l. 73.

In simple description, though hyperboles are not excluded, yet they must be used with more caution, and require more preparation, in order to make the mind relish them. Either the object described must be of that kind, which of itself seizes the fancy strongly, and disposes it to run beyond bounds—something vast, surprising, and new ; or the writer's art must be exerted in heating the fancy gradually, and preparing it to think highly of the object which he intends to exaggerate. When a poet is describing an earthquake, or a storm, or when he has brought us into the midst of a battle, we can bear strong hyperboles without displeasure. But when it is describing only a woman in grief, it is impossible not to be disgusted with such wild exaggeration as the following, in one of our dramatic poets :

—— I found her on the floor  
 In all the storm of grief, yet beautiful :  
 Pouring forth tears at such a lavish rate,  
 That were the world on fire, they might have drown'd  
 The wrath of Heaven, and quenched the mighty ruin.

LEE.

This is mere bombast. The person herself, who was under the distracting agitation of grief, might be permitted to hyperbolise strongly; but the spectator describing her, cannot be allowed an equal liberty; for this plain reason, that the one is supposed to utter the sentiments of passion, the other speaks only the language of description, which is always, according to the dictates of nature, on a lower tone; a distinction which, however obvious, has not been attended to by many writers.

How far a hyperbole, supposing it properly introduced, may be safely carried without overstretching it; what is the proper measure and boundary of this figure, cannot, as far, as I know, be ascertained by any precise rule. Good sense and just taste must determine the point, beyond which, if we pass, we become extravagant. Lucan may be pointed out as an author apt to be excessive in his hyperboles. Among the compliments paid by the Roman poets to their emperors, it had become fashionable to ask them, what part of the heavens they would choose for their habitation, after they should have become gods? Virgil had already carried this sufficiently far in his address to Augustus:

———Tibi brachia contrahit ingens  
Scorpius, et Cœli justa plus parte relinquit\*.

GEOR. I.

\* “The Scorpion ready to receive thy laws,  
“Yields half his region, and contract his paws.”

But this did not suffice Lucan. Resolved to outdo all his predecessors, in a like address to Nero, he very gravely beseeches him not to choose his place near either of the poles, but to be sure to occupy just the middle of the heavens, lest, by going either to one side or other, his weight should over-set the universe :

Sed neque in Arctoo sedem tibi legeris orbe  
 Nec polus adversi calidus qua mergitur austru;  
 Ætheris immensi partem si presseris unam  
 Sentiet axis onus. Librati pondera Cœli  
 Orbe tene medio \*.———

PHARS. I. 53.

Such thoughts as these are what the French call *outrés*, and always proceed from a false fire of genius. The Spanish and African writers, as Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustin, are remarked for being fond of them. As in that epitaph on Charles V. by a Spanish writer :

Pro tumulo ponas orbem, pro tegmine cœlum,  
 Sidera pro facibus, pro lacrymis maria.

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\* But, oh ! whatever be thy Godhead great,  
 Fix not in regions too remote thy seat ;  
 Nor deign thou near the frozen bear to shine,  
 Nor where the sultry southern stars decline.  
 Press not too much on any part the sphere.  
 Hard were the task thy weight divine to bear ;  
 Soon would the axis feel the unusual load,  
 And, groaning, bend beneath th' incumbent God ;  
 O'er the mid orb more equal shalt thou rise,  
 And with a juster balance fix the skies.

Rowe.



Sometimes they dazzle and impose by their boldness ; but wherever reason and good sense are so much violated, there can be no true beauty. Epigrammatic writers are frequently guilty in this respect : resting the whole merit of their epigrams on some extravagant hyperbolical turn, such as the following of Dr Pitcairn's, upon Holland's being gained from the ocean :

Tellurem fecere Dii ; sua littora Belgæ ;  
Immensæque molis opus utrumque fuit ;  
Dii vacuo sparsas glomerârunt æthere terras,  
Nil ibi quod operi possit obesse fuit.  
At Belgis, maria et cœli natura que rerum  
Obstitit ; obstantes hi domuère Deos.

So much for the hyperbole. We proceed now to those figures which lie altogether in the thought ; where the words are taken in their common and literal sense.

Among these, the first place is unquestionably due to Personification, or that figure by which we attribute life and action to inanimate objects. The technical term for this is *Prosopopœia* ; but as personification is of the same import, and more allied to our own language, it will be better to use this word.

It is a figure, the use of which is very extensive, and its foundation laid deep in human nature. At first view, and when considered abstractly, it

would appear to be a figure of the utmost boldness, and to border on the extravagant and ridiculous. For what can seem more remote from the track of reasonable thought, than to speak of stones and trees, and fields and rivers, as if they were living creatures, and to attribute to them thought and sensation, affections and actions? One might imagine this to be no more than childish conceit, which no person of taste could relish. In fact, however, the case is very different. No such ridiculous effect is produced by personification, when properly employed: on the contrary, it is found to be natural and agreeable; nor is any very uncommon degree of passion required, in order to make us relish it. All poetry, even in its most gentle and humble forms, abounds with it. From prose, it is far from being excluded; nay, in common conversation, very frequent approaches are made to it. When we say, the ground *thirsts* for rain, or the earth *smiles* with plenty; when we speak of ambition's being *restless*, or a disease being *deceitful*, such expressions shew the facility with which the mind can accommodate the properties of living creatures to things that are inanimate, or to abstract conceptions of its own forming.

Indeed, it is very remarkable, that there is a wonderful proneness in human nature to animate all objects. Whether this arises from a sort of assimilating principle, from a propensity to spread a resemblance of ourselves over all other things, or

from whatever other cause it arises, so it is, that almost every motion which in the least agitates the mind, bestows upon its object a momentary idea of life. Let a man, by an unwary step, sprain his ancle, or hurt his foot upon a stone, and, in the ruffled discomposed moment, he will sometimes feel himself disposed to break the stone in pieces, or to utter passionate expressions against it, as if it had done him an injury. If one has been long accustomed to a certain set of objects, which have made a strong impression on his imagination; as to a house, where he has passed many agreeable years; or to fields, and trees, and mountains, among which he has often walked with the greatest delight: when he is obliged to part with them, especially if he has no prospect of ever seeing them again, he can scarce avoid having somewhat of the same feeling as when he is leaving old friends. They seem endowed with life. They become objects of his affection; and in the moment of his parting, it scarce seems absurd to him, to give vent to his feeling in words, and to take a formal adieu.

So strong is that impression of life which is made upon us, by the more magnificent and striking objects of nature especially, that I doubt not, in the least, of this having been one cause of the multiplication of divinities in the heathen world. The belief of Dryads and Naiads, of the genius of the wood, and the god of the river,

among men of lively imaginations, in the early ages of the world, easily arose from this turn of mind. When their favourite rural objects had often been animated in their fancy, it was an easy transition to attribute to them some real divinity, some unseen power or genius which inhabited them, or in some peculiar manner belonged to them. Imagination was highly gratified, by thus gaining somewhat to rest upon with more stability; and when belief coincided so much with imagination, very slight causes would be sufficient to establish it.

From this deduction may be easily seen how it comes to pass, that personification makes so great a figure in all compositions, where imagination or passion have any concern. On innumerable occasions, it is the very language of imagination and passion, and therefore deserves to be attended to, and examined with peculiar care. There are three different degrees of this figure; which it is necessary to remark and distinguish, in order to determine the propriety of its use. The first is, when some of the properties or qualities of living creatures are ascribed to inanimate objects; the second, when those inanimate objects are introduced as acting like such as have life; and the third, when they are represented, either as speaking to us, or as listening to what we say to them.

The first and lowest degree of this figure, consists in ascribing to inanimate objects some of the

qualities of living creatures. Where this is done, as is most commonly the case, in a word or two, and by way of an epithet added to the object, as, "a raging storm, a deceitful disease, a cruel disaster," &c. it raises the style so little, that the humblest discourse will admit it without any force. This, indeed, is such an obscure degree of personification, that one may doubt whether it deserves the name, and might not be classed with simple metaphors, which escape in a manner unnoticed. Happily employed, however, it sometimes adds beauty and sprightliness to an expression, as in this line of Virgil:

Aut conjurato descendens Dacus ab Istro.

GEOR. II. 474.

Where the personal epithet, *conjurato*, applied to the river *Istro*, is infinitely more poetical than if it had been applied to the person, thus:

Aut conjuratus descendens Dacus ab Istro.

A very little taste will make any one feel the difference between these two lines.

The next degree of this figure is, when we introduce inanimate objects acting like those that have life. Here we rise a step higher, and the personification becomes sensible. According to the nature of the action, which we attribute to those inanimate objects, and the particularity with which we describe it, such is the strength of the



figure. When purused to any length, it belongs only to studied harangues, to highly figured and eloquent discourse: when slightly touched, it may be admitted into subjects of less elevation. Cicero, for instance, speaking of the cases where killing another is lawful in self-defence, uses the following words: "*Aliquando nobis gladius ad occidendum hominem ab ipsis porrigitur legibus.*" (*Orat. pro Milone.*) The expression is happy. The laws are personified, as reaching forth their hand to give us a sword for putting one to death. Such short personifications as these may be admitted, even into moral treatises, or works of cool reasoning; and, provided they be easy and not strained, and that we be not cloyed with too frequent returns of them, they have a good effect on style, and render it both strong and lively.

The genius of our language gives us an advantage in the use of this figure. As, with us, no substantive nouns have gender, or are masculine and feminine, except the proper names of male and female creatures; by giving a gender to any inanimate object, or abstract idea, that is in place of the pronoun *it*, using the personal pronouns, *he* or *she*, we presently raise the style, and begin personification. In solemn discourse, this may often be done to good purpose when speaking of religion, or virtue, or our country, or any such object of dignity. I shall give a remarkably fine example from a sermon of Bishop Sherlock's,

where we shall see natural religion beautifully personified, and be able to judge from it of the spirit and grace which this figure, when well conducted, bestows on a discourse. I must take notice, at the same time, that it is an instance of this figure, carried as far as prose, even in its highest elevation, will admit, and, therefore, suited only to compositions where the great efforts of eloquence are allowed. The author is comparing together our Saviour and Mahomet: "Go," says he, "to your  
" natural religion; lay before her, Mahomet and  
" his disciples, arrayed in armour and blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands who  
" fell by his victorious sword. Shew her the cities  
" which he set on flames, the countries which he  
" ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When  
" she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into  
" his retirement; shew her the prophet's chamber; his concubines and his wives; and let her  
" hear him allege revelation, and a divine commission, to justify his adultery and lust. When  
" she is tired with this prospect, then shew her  
" the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing  
" good to all the sons of men. Let her see him  
" in his most retired privacies; let her follow him  
" to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to  
" view his poor fare; and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her attend him to the tribunal, and  
" consider the patience with which he endured the

“ scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her  
“ to his cross ; let her view him in the agony of  
“ death, and hear his last prayer for his persecu-  
“ tors; *Father forgive them, for they know not what*  
“ *they do !*—When natural religion has thus view-  
“ ed both, ask her, which is the prophet of God ?  
“ But her answer we have already had, when she  
“ saw part of this scene, through the eyes of the  
“ centurion, who attended at the cross. By him  
“ she spoke, and said, *Truly this Man was the Son*  
“ *of God\*.*” This is more than elegant ; it is  
truly sublime. The whole passage is animated ;  
and the figure rises at the conclusion, when natu-  
ral religion, who, before, was only a spectator, is  
introduced as speaking by the centurion’s voice.  
It has the better effect, too, that it occurs at the  
conclusion of a discourse, where we naturally  
look for most warmth and dignity. Did Bishop  
Sherlock’s sermons, or, indeed, any English ser-  
mons whatever, afford us many passages equal to  
this, we should oftener have recourse to them for  
instances of the beauty of composition.

Hitherto we have spoken of prose ; in poetry  
personifications of this kind are extremely fre-  
quent, and are, indeed, the very life and soul of it.  
We expect to find every thing animated in the  
descriptions of a poet who has a lively fancy. Ac-  
cordingly, Homer, the father and prince of poets,

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\* Bishop Sherlock’s Sermons, Vol. I. Disc. ix.

is remarkable for the use of this figure. War, peace, darts, spears, towns, rivers, every thing, in short, is alive in his writings. The same is the case with Milton and Shakespeare. No personification, in any author, is more striking, or introduced on a more proper occasion, than the following of Milton's, on occasion of Eve's eating the forbidden fruit :

So saying, her rash hand, in evil hour  
Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck'd, she eat ;  
Earth felt the wound, and Nature, from her seat  
Sighing, through all her works, gave signs of woe,  
That all was lost.——

All the circumstances and ages of men, poverty, riches, youth, old age, all the dispositions and passions, melancholy, love, grief, contentment, are capable of being personified in poetry with great propriety. Of this, we meet with frequent examples in Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, Parnell's *Hymn to Contentment*, Thomson's *Seasons*, and all the good poets ; nor, indeed, is it easy to set any bounds to personifications of this kind in poetry.

One of the greatest pleasures we receive from poetry is, to find ourselves always in the midst of our fellows ; and to see every thing thinking, feeling, and acting, as we ourselves do. This is perhaps the principal charm of this sort of figured style, that it introduces us into society with all nature, and interests us, even in inanimate ob-

jects, by forming a connection between them and us, through that sensibility which it ascribes to them. This is exemplified in the following beautiful passage of Thomson's *Summer*, wherein the life which he bestows upon all nature, when describing the effects of the rising sun, renders the scenery uncommonly gay and interesting.

But yonder comes the powerful king of day  
Rejoicing in the East. The lessening cloud,  
The kindling azure, and the mountain's brow  
Tipt with æthereal gold, his near approach  
Betoken glad.——

——By the refin'd,  
In brisker measures, the relucient stream  
Frisks o'er the mead. The precipice abrupt,  
Projecting horror on the blacken'd flood,  
Softens at thy return. The desert joys,  
Wildly through all his melancholy bounds  
Rude ruins glitter ; and the briny deep,  
Seen from some pointed promontory's top,  
Reflects from every fluctuating wave  
A glance extensive as the day.——

The same effect is remarkable in that fine passage of Milton :

——To the nuptial bower,  
I led her blushing like the morn. All heaven  
And happy constellations, on that hour,  
Shed their selectest influence. The earth  
Gave signs of gratulation, and each hill.  
Joyous the birds : fresh gales, and gentle airs  
Whisper'd it to the woods, and from their wings  
Flung rose, flung odour from the spicy shrub,  
Disporting.——



The third and highest degree of this figure remains to be mentioned, when inanimate objects are introduced, not only as feeling and acting, but as speaking to us, or hearing and listening when we address ourselves to them. This, though on several occasions far from being unnatural, is, however, more difficult in the execution, than the other kinds of personification. For this is plainly the boldest of all rhetorical figures; it is the style of strong passion only; and, therefore, never to be attempted, unless when the mind is considerably heated and agitated. A slight personification of some inanimate thing, acting as if it had life, can be relished by the mind, in the midst of cool description, and when its ideas are going on in the ordinary train. But it must be in a state of violent emotion, and have departed considerably from its common track of thought, before it can so far realise the personification of an insensible object, as to conceive it listening to what we say, or making any return to us. All strong passions, however, have a tendency to use this figure; not only love, anger, and indignation, but even those which are seemingly more dispiriting, such as grief, remorse, and melancholy. For all passions struggle for vent, and if they can find no other object, will, rather than be silent, pour themselves forth to woods, and rocks, and the most insensible things; especially, if these be in any degree connected with the causes and objects that have thrown the mind into this agitation. Hence, in poetry, where the greatest liberty is allowed to the language of pas-

sion, it is easy to produce many beautiful examples of this figure. Milton affords us an extremely fine one, in that moving and tender address which Eve makes to Paradise, just before she is compelled to leave it.

Oh ! unexpected stroke, worse than of death !  
 Must I thus leave thee, Paradise ! thus leave  
 Thee, native soil, these happy walks, and shades,  
 Fit haunt of gods ! where I had hope to spend  
 Quiet, though sad, the respite of that day  
 Which must be mortal to us both. O flowers !  
 That never will in other climate grow,  
 My early visitation and my last  
 At ev'n, which I bred up with tender hand,  
 From your first op'ning buds, and gave you names !  
 Who now shall rear you to the sun, or rank  
 Your tribes, and water from th' ambrosial fount ?

Book II. l. 268.

This is altogether the language of nature, and of female passion. It is observable, that all plaintive passions are peculiarly prone to the use of this figure. The complaints which Philoctetes, in Sophocles, pours out to the rocks and caves of Lemnos, amidst the excess of his grief and despair, are remarkably fine examples of it \*. And

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\* 'Ω λιμνίς, ὃ πρόβλητις, ὃ ζυνουσίαι  
 Θηρῶν οὐρίων, ὃ καταρρύγις πέτραι  
 Ἵμιν ταῦδ', ἔ γαρ ἄλλοι δ'ιδ' ἴτα λεγώ·  
 Ἀνακλαισθαι παρκοι τοις τιωέσιν, &c.

" O mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds,

" To you I speak ! to you alone I now

" Must breathe my sorrows ! you are wont to hear

" My sad complaints, and I will tell you all

" That I have suffer'd from Achilles' son !" FRANKLIN.

there are frequent examples, not in poetry only, but in real life, of persons, when just about to suffer death, taking a passionate farewell of the sun, moon, and stars, or other sensible objects around them.

There are two great rules for the management of this sort of personification. The first rule is, never to attempt it, unless when prompted by strong passion, and never to continue it when the passion begins to flag. It is one of those high ornaments which can only find place in the most warm and spirited parts of composition ; and there, too, must be employed with moderation.

The second rule is, never to personify any object in this way, but such as has some dignity in itself, and can make a proper figure in this elevation to which we raise it. The observance of this rule is required, even in the lower degrees of personification ; but still more, when an address is made to the personified object. To address the corpse of a deceased friend, is natural ; but to address the clothes which he wore, introduces mean and degrading ideas. So also, addressing the several parts of one's body, as if they were animated, is not congruous to the dignity of passion. For this reason, I must condemn the following passage, in a very beautiful poem of Mr Pope's, *Eloisa to Abelard*.

Dear fatal name ! rest ever unreveal'd,  
Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd.  
Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,  
Where, mix'd with God's, his lov'd idea lies.

O write it not my hand !—his name appears  
Already written :—Blot it out, my tears !

Here are several different objects and parts of the body personified ; and each of them is addressed or spoken to ; let us consider with what propriety. The first is the name of Abelard ; “ Dear fatal “ name ! rest ever,” &c. To this no reasonable objection can be made. For, as the name of a person often stands for the person himself, and suggests the same ideas, it can bear this personification with sufficient dignity. Next, Eloisa speaks to herself ; and personifies her heart for this purpose : “ Hide it, my heart, within that close,” &c. As the heart is a dignified part of the human frame, and is often put for the mind or affections, this also may pass without blame. But, when from her heart she passes to her hand, and tells her hand not to write his name, this is forced and unnatural ; a personified hand is low, and not in the style of true passion ; and the figure becomes still worse, when, in the last place, she exhorts her tears to blot out what her hand had written, “ Oh ! write “ it not,” &c. There is, in these two lines, an air of epigrammatic conceit, which native passion never suggests ; and which is altogether unsuitable to the tenderness which breathes through the rest of that excellent poem.

In prose compositions, this figure requires to be used with still greater moderation and delicacy.

The same liberty is not allowed to the imagination there, as in poetry. The same assistances cannot be obtained for raising passion to its proper height by the force of numbers, and the glow of style. However, addresses to inanimate objects are not excluded from prose; but have their place only in the higher species of oratory. A public speaker may on some occasions very properly address religion or virtue; or his native country, or some city or province, which has suffered perhaps great calamities, or been the scene of some memorable action. But we must remember, that as such addresses are among the highest efforts of eloquence, they should never be attempted, unless by persons of more than ordinary genius. For if the orator fails in his design of moving our passions by them, he is sure of being laughed at. Of all frigid things, the most frigid are the awkward and unseasonable attempts sometimes made towards such kinds of personification, especially if they be long continued. We see the writer or speaker toiling and labouring, to express the language of some passion which he neither feels himself, nor can make us feel. We remain not only cold, but frozen; and are at full leisure to criticise on the ridiculous figure which the personified object makes, when we ought to have been transported with a glow of enthusiasm. Some of the French writers, particularly Bossuet and Flechier, in their sermons and funeral orations, have attempted and executed this figure, not without warmth and dignity. Their



works are exceedingly worthy of being consulted, for instances of this, and of several other ornaments of style. Indeed, the vivacity and ardour of the French genius is more suited to this bold species of oratory, than the more correct, but less animated genius of the British, who, in their prose works, very rarely attempt any of the high figures of eloquence\*. So much for personifications, or propopœia, in all its different forms.

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\* In the "Oraisons Funebres de M. Bossuet," which I consider as one of the master-pieces of modern eloquence, apostrophes and addresses to personified objects frequently occur, and are supported with much spirit. Thus, for instance, in the funeral oration of Mary of Austria, queen of France, the author addresses Algiers, in the prospect of the advantage which the arms of Louis XIV. were to gain over it: "Avant lui la France, presque sans vaisseaux, tenoit en vain aux deux mers. Maintenant, on les voit couvertes, depuis le Levant jusqu'au couchant, de nos flottes victorieuses; et la hardiesse Francoise port par tout la terreur avec le nom de Louis. Tu cederas, tu tomberas sous le vainqueur, Alger! riche des dépouilles de la chrétienté. Tu disois en ton cœur avare, je tiens le mer sous ma loi, et les nations sont ma proie. La legereté de tes vaisseaux te donnoit de la confiance. Mais tu te verras attaqué dans tes murailles, comme un oiseau ravissant, qu'on iroit chercher parmi ses rochers, et dans son nid, où il partage son butin à ses petits. Tu rends déjà tes esclaves. Louis a brisé les fers, dont tu acablois ses sujets," &c. In another passage of the same oration, he thus apostrophises the Isle of Pheasants, which had been rendered famous by being the scene of those conferences in which the treaty of the Pyrenees between France and Spain, and the marriage of this princess with the King of France, were concluded. "Isle pacifique, où se

Apostrophe is a figure so much of the same kind, that it will not require many words. It is an address to a real person ; but one who is either absent or dead, as if he were present, and listening to us. It is so much allied to an address to inanimate objects personified, that both these figures are sometimes called apostrophes. However, the proper apostrophe is in boldness one degree lower than the address to personified objects ; for it certainly requires a less effort of imagination to suppose persons present who are dead or absent, than to animate insensible beings, and direct our discourse to them. Both figures are subject to the same rule of being prompted by passion, in order

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“ doivent terminer les differends de deux grands empires à qui  
 “ tu sers de limites ! isle eternellement memorable par les con-  
 “ ferences de deux grands ministres !——Auguste journée, où  
 “ deux fieres nations, long tems ennemis, et alors reconcilés par  
 “ Marie Therese, s’avancent sur leurs confins, leurs rois à leur  
 “ tête, non plus pour se combattre, mais pour s’embrasser !—  
 “ Fêtes sacré, esmariage fortuné, voile nuptial, benediction, sa-  
 “ crifice, puis-je meler adjourdhui vos ceremonies, et vos pom-  
 “ pes, avec ces pompes funebres, et le comble des grandeurs  
 “ avec leurs ruines !” In the funeral oration of Henrietta, queen  
 of England (which is perhaps the noblest of all his compositions)  
 after recounting all she had done to support her unfortunate hus-  
 band, he concludes with this beautiful apostrophe : “ O mere !  
 “ O femme ! O reine admirable, et digne d’une meilleure for-  
 “ tune, si les fortunes de la terre étoient quelque chose ! Enfin  
 “ il faut ceder à votre sort. Vouz avez assez soutenu l’état, qui  
 “ est attaqué par une force invincible et divine. Il ne reste  
 “ plus deormais, si non que vous teniez ferme parmi ses ruines.”

to render them natural ; for both are the language of passion, or strong emotions only. Among the poets, apostrophe is frequent ; as in Virgil :

——Pereunt Hypanisque Dymasque

Confixi a sociis ; nec te, tua plurima, Pantheu

Labentem pietas, nec Apollinis insula texit \* !

The poems of Ossian are full of the most beautiful instances of this figure : “ Weep on the  
“ rocks of roaring winds, O maid of Inistore ;  
“ bend thy fair head over the waves, thou fairer  
“ than the ghosts of the hills when it moves in a  
“ sunbeam at noon over the silence of Morven !  
“ he is fallen ! Thy youth is low ; pale beneath  
“ the sword of Cuthullin † !” Quintilian affords us a very fine example in prose ; when, in the beginning of his sixth book, deploring the untimely death of his son, which had happened during the course of the work, he makes a very moving and tender apostrophe to him : “ Nam quo ille animo,  
“ qua medicorum admiratione, mensium octo va-  
“ letudinem tulit ? ut me in supremis consolatus  
“ est ? quam etiam jam deficiens, jamque non  
“ noster, ipsum illum alienatæ mentes errorem  
“ circa solas literas habuit ? Tuosne ergo, O meæ

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\* Nor Pantheus ! thee, thy mitre, nor the bands  
Of awful Phœbus, sav'd from impious hands.

DRYDEN.

† Fingal, B. I.

“ spes inanes ! labentes oculos tuum fugientem  
 “ spiritum vidi ? Tuum corpus frigidum, exangue  
 “ complexus, animam recipere, auramque com-  
 “ munem haurire amplius potui ? Tene, consulari  
 “ nuper adoptione ad omnium spes honorum pa-  
 “ tris admotum, te, avunculo prætori generum  
 “ destinatum ; te, omnium spe Atticæ eloquentiæ  
 “ candidatum, parens superstes tantum ad pœnas  
 “ anisi \* !” In this passage, Quintilian shews the  
 true genius of an orator, as much as he does else-  
 where that of the critic.

For such bold figures of discourse as strong  
 personifications, addresses to personified objects,

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\* “ With what spirit, and how much to the admiration of the  
 “ physicians, did he bear, throughout eight months, his lingering  
 “ distress ! With what tender attention did he study, even in the  
 “ last extremity, to comfort me ! And, when no longer himself,  
 “ how affecting was it to behold the disordered efforts of his  
 “ wandering mind, wholly employed on subjects of literature !  
 “ Ah, my frustrated and fallen hopes ! Have I then beheld your  
 “ closing eyes, and heard the last groan issue from your lips ?  
 “ After having embraced your cold and breathless body, how  
 “ was it in my power to draw the vital air, or continue to drag a  
 “ miserable life ? When I had just beheld you raised by consular  
 “ adoption, to the prospect of all your father’s honours, destined  
 “ to be son-in-law to your uncle, the prætor, pointed out by ge-  
 “ neral expectation as the successful candidate for the prize of  
 “ Attic eloquence, in this moment of your opening honours, must  
 “ I lose you for ever, and remain an unhappy parent, surviving  
 “ only to suffer woe ?”



and apostrophes, the glowing imagination of the ancient oriental nations was particularly fitted. Hence, in the sacred Scriptures, we find some very remarkable instances: “ O thou sword of the Lord! how long will it be ere thou be quiet; put thyself up into the scabbard, rest and be still! How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea-shore? there he hath appointed it\*.” There is one passage in particular, which I must not omit to mention, because it contains a greater assemblage of sublime ideas, of bold and daring figures, than is perhaps any where to be met with. It is in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet thus describes the fall of the Assyrian empire: “ Thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke: he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for

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\* Jer. xlvii. 6, 7.



“ thee, even all the chief ones of the earth : it  
“ hath raised up from their thrones all the kings  
“ of the nations. All they shall speak and say  
“ unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we ?  
“ Art thou become like unto us ? Thy pomp is  
“ brought down to the grave, and the noise of  
“ thy viols ; the worm is spread under thee, and  
“ the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen  
“ from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning !  
“ how art thou cut down to the ground, which  
“ didst weaken the nations ! For thou hast said in  
“ thine heart, I will ascend into Heaven, I will  
“ exalt my throne above the stars of God ; I will  
“ sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in  
“ the sides of the north. I will ascend above the  
“ heights of the clouds ; I will be like the Most  
“ High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to  
“ hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see  
“ thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consi-  
“ der thee, saying, Is this the man which made the  
“ earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms ?  
“ that made the world as a wilderness, and de-  
“ stroyed the cities thereof ? that opened not the  
“ house of his prisoners ? All the kings of the  
“ nations, even all of them lie in glory, every  
“ one in his own house. But thou art cast out of  
“ thy grave, like an abominable branch : and as  
“ the raiment of those that are slain, thrust  
“ through with a sword, that go down to the  
“ stones of the pit, as a carcase trodden under  
“ feet.” This whole passage is full of sublimity.

Every object is animated ; a variety of personages are introduced : we hear the Jews, the fir-trees, and cedars of Lebanon, the ghosts of departed kings, the king of Babylon himself, and those who look upon his body, all speaking in their order, and acting their different parts without confusion.

## LECTURE XVII.

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COMPARISON, ANTITHESIS, INTERROGATION, EXCLAMATION, AND OTHER FIGURES OF SPEECH.

**WE** are still engaged in the consideration of figures of speech, which as they add much to the beauty of style, when properly employed, and are at the same time liable to be greatly abused, require a careful discussion. As it would be tedious to dwell on all the variety of figurative expressions which rhetoricians have enumerated, I chose to select the capital figures, such as occur most frequently, and to make my remarks on these; the principles and rules laid down concerning them will sufficiently direct us to the use of the rest, either in prose or poetry. Of metaphor, which is the most common of them all, I treated fully; and in the last Lecture I discoursed of hyperbole, personification, and apostrophe. This Lecture will nearly finish what remains on the head of figures.

Comparison, or simile, is what I am to treat of first; a figure frequently employed both by poets and prose writers, for the ornament of composition. In a former Lecture, I explained fully the difference betwixt this and metaphor. A metaphor is a comparison implied, but not expressed as such; as when I say, "Achilles is a lion," meaning that he resembles one in courage or strength. A comparison is, when the resemblance between two objects is expressed in form, and generally pursued more fully than the nature of a metaphor admits; as when I say, "The actions of princes are like those great rivers, the course of which every one beholds, but their springs have been seen by few." This slight instance will shew, that a happy comparison is a kind of sparkling ornament, which adds not a little lustre and beauty to discourse; and hence such figures are termed by Cicero, "*Orationis lumina*."

The pleasure we take in comparisons is just and natural. We may remark three different sources whence it arises. First, from the pleasure which nature has annexed to that act of the mind by which we compare any two objects together, trace resemblances among those that are different, and differences among those that resemble each other; a pleasure, the final cause of which is, to prompt us to remark and observe, and thereby to make us advance in useful knowledge. This ope-

ration of the mind is naturally and universally agreeable ; as appears from the delight which even children have in comparing things together, as soon as they are capable of attending to the objects that surround them. Secondly, the pleasure of comparison arises from the illustration which the simile employed gives to the principal object ; from the clearer view of it which it presents ; or the more strong impression of it which it stamps upon the mind ; and, thirdly, it arises from the introduction of a new, and commonly a splendid object, associated to the principal one of which we treat ; and from the agreeable picture which that object presents to the fancy ; new scenes being thereby brought into view, which, without the assistance of this figure, we could not have enjoyed.

All comparisons whatever may be reduced under two heads, *explaining* and *embellishing* comparisons. For when a writer likens the object of which it treats to any other thing, it always is, or at least always should be, with a view either to make us understand that object more distinctly, or to dress it up, and adorn it. All manner of subjects admit of explaining comparisons. Let an author be reasoning ever so strictly, or treating the most abstruse point in philosophy, he may very properly introduce a comparison, merely with a view to make his subject better understood. Of this nature is the following in Mr Harris's



Hermes, employed to explain a very abstract point, the distinction between the powers of sense and imagination in the human mind. "As wax," says he, "would not be adequate to the purpose of signification, if it had not the power to retain as well as to receive the impression, the same holds of the soul with respect to sense and imagination. Sense is its receptive power; imagination its retentive. Had it sense without imagination, it would not be as wax, but as water, where though all impressions be instantly made, yet as soon as they are made they are instantly lost." In comparisons of this nature, the understanding is concerned much more than the fancy: and therefore the only rules to be observed with respect to them, are, that they be clear, and that they be useful; that they tend to render our conception of the principal object more distinct; and that they do not lead our view aside, and bewilder it with any false light.

But embellishing comparisons, introduced not so much with a view to inform and instruct, as to adorn the subject of which we treat, are those with which we are chiefly concerned at present, as figures of speech; and those, indeed, which most frequently occur. Resemblance, as I before mentioned, is the foundation of this figure. We must not, however, take resemblance in too strict a sense, for actual similitude and likeness of appearance. Two objects may sometimes be very hap-

pily compared to one another, though they resemble each other, strictly speaking, in nothing ; only, because they agree in the effects which they produce upon the mind ; because they raise a train of similar, or, what may be called, concordant ideas ; so that the remembrance of the one, when recalled, serves to strengthen the impression made by the other. For example, to describe the nature of soft and melancholy music, Ossian says, “ The music of Carrol was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul.” This is happy and delicate. Yet surely, no kind of music has any resemblance to a feeling of the mind, such as the memory of past joys. Had it been compared to the voice of the nightingale, or the murmur of the stream, as it would have been by some ordinary poet, the likeness would have been more strict ; but, by founding his simile upon the effect which Carrol’s music produced, the poet, while he conveys a very tender image, gives us, at the same time, a much stronger impression of the nature and strain of that music : “ Like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul.”

In general, whether comparisons be founded on the similitude of the two objects compared, or on some analogy and agreement in their effects, the fundamental requisite of a comparison is, that it shall serve to illustrate the object, for the sake of which it is introduced, and to give us a stronger

conception of it. Some little excursions of fancy may be permitted in pursuing the simile; but they must never deviate far from the principal object. If it be a great and noble one, every circumstance in the comparison must tend to aggrandize it; if it be a beautiful one, to render it more amiable; if terrible, to fill us with more awe. But to be a little more particular: The rules to be given concerning comparisons, respect chiefly two articles; the propriety of their introduction, and the nature of the objects whence they are taken.

First, The propriety of their introduction. From what has been already said of comparisons, it appears that they are not, like the figures of which I treated in the last Lecture, the language of strong passion. No; they are the language of imagination rather than of passion; of an imagination sprightly, indeed, and warmed; but undisturbed by any violent or agitating emotion. Strong passion is too severe to admit this play of fancy. It has no leisure to cast about for resembling objects; it dwells on that object which has seized and taken possession of the soul. It is too much occupied and filled by it, to turn its view aside, or to fix its attention on any other thing. An author, therefore, can scarcely commit a greater fault, than in the midst of passion, to introduce a simile. Metaphorical expression may be allowable in such a situation; though even this

may be carried too far; but the pomp and solemnity of a formal comparison is altogether a stranger to passion. It changes the key in a moment; relaxes and brings down the mind; and shews us a writer perfectly at his ease, while he is personating some other, who is supposed to be under the torment of agitation. Our writers of tragedies are very apt to err here. In some of Mr Rowe's plays, these flowers of similes have been strewn unseasonably. Mr Addison's Cato, too, is justly censurable in this respect; as, when Portius, just after Lucia had bid him farewell for ever, and when he should naturally have been represented as in the most violent anguish, makes his reply in a studied and affected comparison :

Thus o'er the dying lamp th' unsteady flame  
Hangs quivering on a point, leaps off by fits,  
And falls again, as loth to quit its hold.  
Thou must not go ; my soul still hovers o'er thee,  
And can't get loose.

Every one must be sensible, that this is quite remote from the language of nature on such occasions.

However, as comparison is not the style of strong passion, so neither, when employed for embellishment, is it the language of a mind wholly unmoved. It is a figure of dignity, and always requires some elevation in the subject, in order to make it proper ; for it supposes the imagination to be uncommonly enlivened, though the heart be not

agitated by passion. In a word, the proper place of comparisons lies in the middle region between the highly pathetic, and the very humble style. This is a wide field, and gives ample range to the figure. But even this field we must take care not to overstock with it. For, as we before said, it is a sparkling ornament, and all things that sparkle, dazzle and fatigue, if they recur too often. Similes should, even in poetry, be used with moderation; but, in prose writings, much more: otherwise, the style will become disagreeably florid, and the ornament lose its virtue and effect.

I proceed, next, to the rules that relate to objects whence comparisons should be drawn; supposing them introduced in their proper place.

In the first place, they must not be drawn from things which have too near and obvious a resemblance to the object with which we compare them. The great pleasure of the act of comparing lies, in discovering likenesses among things of different species, where we would not, at the first glance, expect a resemblance. There is little art or ingenuity in pointing out the resemblance of two objects, that are so much akin, or lie so near to one another in nature, that every one sees they must be alike. When Milton compares Satan's appearance, after his fall, to that of the sun suffering an eclipse, and affrighting the nations with portentous darkness, we are struck with the happi-



ness and the dignity of the similitude. But when he compares Eve's bower in Paradise to the arbour of Pomona; or Eve herself, to a driad, or wood-nymph, we receive little entertainment: as every one sees, that one arbour, must, of course, in several respects resemble another arbour, and one beautiful woman another beautiful woman.

Among similes faulty through too great obviousness of the likeness, we must likewise rank those which are taken from objects become trite and familiar in poetical language. Such are the similes of a hero to a lion, of a person in sorrow to a flower drooping its head, of violent passion to a tempest, of chastity to snow, of virtue to the sun or the stars, and many more of this kind, with which we are sure to find modern writers, of second-rate genius, abounding plentifully; handed down from every writer of verses to another, as by hereditary right. These comparisons were, at first, perhaps, very proper for the purposes to which they are applied. In the ancient original poets, who took them directly from nature, not from their predecessors, they add beauty. But they are now beaten; our ears are so accustomed to them, that they give no amusement to the fancy. There is, indeed, no mark by which we can more readily distinguish a poet of true genius, from one of a barren imagination, than by the strain of their comparisons. All who call themselves poets affect them: but, whereas a mere versifier copies no

new image from nature, which appears to his un-inventive genius exhausted by those who have gone before him, and, therefore, contents himself with humbly following their track ; to an author of real fancy, nature seems to unlock, spontaneously, her hidden stores ; and the eye, “ quick  
“ glancing from earth to heaven,” discovers new shapes and forms, new likenesses between objects unobserved before, which render his similes original, expressive, and lively.

But, in the second place, as comparisons ought not to be founded on likenesses too obvious, still less ought they to be founded on those which are too faint and remote. For these, in place of assisting, strain the fancy to comprehend them, and throw no light upon the subject. It is also to be observed, that a comparison which, in the principal circumstances, carries a sufficiently near resemblance, may become unnatural and obscure, if pushed too far. Nothing is more opposite to the design of this figure, than to hunt after a great number of coincidences in minute points, merely to shew how far the poet’s wit can stretch the resemblance. This is Mr Cowley’s common fault ; whose comparisons generally run out so far, as to become rather a studied exercise of wit, than an illustration of the principal object. We need only open his works, his odes especially, to find instances every where.

In the third place, the object from which a comparison is drawn, should never be an unknown object, or one of which few people can form clear ideas: “*Ad inferendam rebus lucem,*” says Quintilian, “*repertæ sunt similitudines. Præcipue, igitur, est custodiendum ne id quod similitudinis gratia ascivimus, aut obscurum sit, aut ignotum. Debet enim id quod illustrandæ alterius rei gratia assumitur, ipsum esse clarius eo quod illuminatur\*.*” Comparisons, therefore, founded on philosophical discoveries, or on any thing with which persons of a certain trade only, or a certain profession, are conversant, attain not their proper effect. They should be taken from those illustrious, noted objects, which most of the readers either have seen, or can strongly conceive. This leads me to remark a fault, of which modern poets are very apt to be guilty. The ancients took their similes from that face of nature, and that class of objects, with which they and their readers were acquainted. Hence lions, and wolves, and serpents, were fruitful, and very proper sources of similes amongst them; and these having become

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\* “Comparisons have been introduced into discourse for the sake of throwing light on the subject. We must, therefore, be much on our guard, not to employ, as the ground of our simile, any object which is either obscure or unknown. That, surely, which is used for the purpose of illustrating some other thing, ought to be more obvious and plain than the thing intended to be illustrated.”

a sort of consecrated, classical images, are very commonly adopted by the moderns ; injudiciously, however, for the propriety of them is now, in a great measure, lost. It is only at second hand, and by description, that we are acquainted with many of those objects ; and to most readers of poetry, it were more to the purpose, to describe lions, or serpents, by similes taken from men, than to describe men by lions. Now-a-days, we can more easily form the conception of a fierce combat between two men, than between a bull and a tiger. Every country has a scenery peculiar to itself ; and the imagery of every good poet will exhibit it. The introduction of unknown objects, or of a foreign scenery, betrays a poet copying, not after nature, but from other writers. I have only to observe further,

In the fourth place, that, in compositions of a serious or elevated kind, similes should never be taken from low or mean objects. These are degrading ; whereas, similes are commonly intended to embellish, and to dignify ; and therefore, unless in burlesque writings, or where similes are introduced purposely to vilify and diminish an object ; mean ideas should never be presented to us. Some of Homer's comparisons have been taxed without reason, on this account. For it is to be remembered, that the meanness or dignity of objects depends, in a great degree, on the ideas and manners of the age wherein we live. Many simi-



les, therefore, drawn from the incidents of rural life, which appear low to us, had abundance of dignity in those simpler ages of antiquity.

I have now considered such of the figures of speech as seemed most to merit a full and particular discussion; metaphor, hyperbole, personification, apostrophe, and comparison. A few more yet remain to be mentioned; the proper use and conduct of which will be easily understood from the principles already laid down.

As comparison is founded on the resemblance, so antithesis on the contrast or opposition of two objects. Contrast has always this effect, to make each of the contrasted objects appear in the stronger light. White, for instance, never appears so bright as when it is opposed to black, and when both are viewed together. Antithesis, therefore, may, on many occasions, be employed to advantage, in order to strengthen the impression which we intend that any object should make. Thus Cicero, in his oration for Milo, representing the improbability of Milo's forming a design to take away the life of Clodius, at a time when all circumstances were unfavourable to such a design, and after he had let other opportunities slip, when he could have executed the same design, if he had formed it, with much more ease and safety, heightens our conviction of this improbability by a skilful use of this figure: "*Quem igitur cum omnium gratia inter-*



“ficere noluit, hunc voluit cum aliquorum que-  
 “rela? Quem jure, quem loco, quem tempor,  
 “quem impune, non est ausus, hunc injuria,  
 “iniquo loco, alieno tempore, periculo capitis,  
 “non dubitavit occidere \*? In order to render  
 an antithesis more complete, it is always of ad-  
 vantage, that the words and members of the sen-  
 tence expressing the contrasted objects, be, as in  
 this instance of Cicero's, similarly constructed and  
 made to correspond to each other. This leads us  
 to remark the contrast more, by setting the things  
 which we oppose more clearly over against each  
 other; in the same manner as when we contrast a  
 black and a white object, in order to perceive the  
 full difference of their colour, we would choose to  
 have both objects of the same bulk, and placed in  
 the same light. Their resemblance to each other,  
 in certain circumstances makes their disagreement  
 in others more palpable.

At the same time, I must observe, that the  
 frequent use of antithesis, especially where the op-  
 position in the words is nice and quaint, is apt to

\* “Is it credible that, when he declined putting Clodius to  
 “death with the consent of all, he would choose to do it with  
 “the disapprobation of many? Can you believe that the per-  
 “son whom he scrupled to slay, when he might have done so  
 “with full justice, in a convenient place, at a proper time, with  
 “secure impunity, he made no scruple to murder against justice,  
 “in an unfavourable place, at an unseasonable time, and at the  
 “risk of capital condemnation?”

render style disagreeable. Such a sentence as the following, from Seneca, does very well, where it stands alone : “ Si quem volueris esse divitem, non  
 “ est quod augeas divitias, sed minuas cupiditates \*.” Or this : “ Si ad naturam vives, nunquam  
 “ eris pauper, si ad opinionem, nunquam dives †.” A maxim, or moral saying, properly enough receives this form ; both because it is supposed to be the fruit of meditation, and because it is designed to be engraven on the memory, which recalls it more easily by the help of such contrasted expressions. But where a string of such sentences succeed each other ; where this becomes an author’s favourite and prevailing manner of expressing himself, his style is faulty : and it is upon this account Seneca has been often, and justly, censured. Such a style appears too studied and laboured ; it gives us the impression of an author attending more to his manner of saying things, than to the things themselves which he says. Dr Young, though a writer of real genius, was too fond of antithesis. In his estimate of Human Life, we find whole passages that run in such a strain as this : “ The peasant complains aloud,  
 “ the courtier in secret repines. In want, what

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\* “ If you seek to make one rich, study not to increase his stores, but do diminish his desires.”

† “ If you regulate your desires according to the standard of nature, you will never be poor ; if according to the standard of opinion, you will never be rich.”

“ distress ! in affluence, what satiety ! The great  
“ are under as much difficulty to expend with  
“ pleasure, as the mean to labour with success.  
“ The ignorant, through ill grounded hope, are  
“ disappointed ; the knowing, through knowledge,  
“ despond. Ignorance occasions mistake ; mis-  
“ take, disappointment ; and disappointment is  
“ misery. Knowledge, on the other hand, gives  
“ true judgment ; and true judgment of human  
“ things, gives a demonstration of their insuffici-  
“ ency to our peace.” There is too much glitter  
in such a style as this to please long. We are  
fatigued, by attending to such quaint and artifi-  
cial sentences often repeated.

There is another sort of antithesis, the beauty  
of which consists in surprising us by the unex-  
pected contrast of things which it brings together.  
Much wit may be shewn in this ; but it belongs  
wholly to pieces of professed wit and humour, and  
can find no place in grave compositions. Mr  
Pope, who is remarkably fond of antithesis, is of-  
ten happy in this use of the figure. So, in his  
Rape of the Lock :

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,  
Or some frail china jar receive a flaw ;  
Or strain her honour, or her new brocade ;  
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade ;  
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball ;  
Or whether heaven has doom'd that Shock must fall.

What is called the point of an epigram, consists, for most part, in some antithesis of this kind; surprising us with the smart and unexpected turn which it gives to the thought; and in the fewer words it is brought out, it is always the happier.

Comparisons and antithesis are figures of a cool nature; the productions of imagination, not of passion. Interrogations and exclamations, of which I am next to speak, are passionate figures. They are, indeed, on so many occasions, the native language of passion, that their use is extremely frequent; and, in ordinary conversation, when men are heated, they prevail as much as in the most sublime oratory. The unfigured, literal use of interrogation, is, to ask a question; but when men are prompted by passion, whatever they would affirm, or deny, with great vehemence, they naturally put in the form of a question; expressing thereby the strongest confidence of the truth of their own sentiment, and appealing to their hearers for the impossibility of the contrary. Thus, in Scripture: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said it? and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken it? and shall he not make it good\*?" So Demosthenes addressing himself to the Athenians: "Tell me, will you still go about and ask one another, what news? What

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\* Numbers, chap. xxiii. ver. 19.

“ can be more astonishing news than this, that  
“ the man of Macedon makes war upon the Athe-  
“ nians, and disposes of the affairs of Greece?  
“ Is Philip dead? No, but he is sick. What  
“ signifies it to you whether he be dead or alive?  
“ For, if any thing happens to this Philip, you  
“ will immediately raise up another.” All this,  
delivered without interrogation, had been faint  
and ineffectual; but the warmth and eagerness  
which this questioning method expresses, awakens  
the hearers, and strikes them with much greater  
force.

Interrogations may often be employed with  
propriety, in the course of no higher emotions  
than naturally arise in pursuing some close and  
earnest reasoning. But exclamations belong only  
to stronger emotions of the mind; to surprise, ad-  
miration, anger, joy, grief, and the like:

Heu pietas! heu prisca fides! invictaque bello  
Dextra!

Both interrogation and exclamation, and, indeed,  
all passionate figures of speech, operate upon us  
by means of sympathy. Sympathy is a very  
powerful and extensive principle in our nature,  
disposing us to enter into every feeling and passion  
which we behold expressed by others. Hence, a  
single person coming into company with strong  
marks, either of melancholy or joy, upon his coun-  
tenance, will diffuse that passion, in a moment,



through the whole circle. Hence, in a great crowd, passions are so easily caught, and so fast spread, by that powerful contagion which the animated looks, cries, and gestures of a multitude never fail to carry. Now, interrogations and exclamations, being natural signs of a moved and agitated mind, always, when they are properly used, dispose us to sympathise with the dispositions of those who use them, and to feel as they feel.

From this it follows, that the great rule with regard to the conduct of such figures is, that the writer attend to the manner in which nature dictates to us to express any emotion or passion, and that he give his language that turn, and no other; above all, that he never affect the style of a passion which he does not feel. With interrogations he may use a good deal of freedom; these, as above observed, falling in so much with the ordinary course of language and reasoning, even when no great vehemence is supposed to have place in the mind. But, with respect to exclamations, he must be more reserved. Nothing has a worse effect than the frequent and unreasonable use of them. Raw juvenile writers imagine, that, by pouring them forth often, they render their compositions warm and animated. Whereas quite the contrary follows. They render it frigid to excess. When an author is always calling upon us to enter into transports which he has said nothing to inspire, we are both disgusted and enraged at him. He

raises no sympathy, for he gives us no passion of his own, in which we can take part. He gives us words, and not passion; and, of course, can raise no passion, unless that of indignation. Hence I am inclined to think, he was not much mistaken, who said, that when, on looking into a book, he found the pages thick bespangled with the point which is called, "*Punctum admirationis*," he judged this to be a sufficient reason for his laying it aside. And, indeed, were it not for the help of this "*punctum admirationis*," with which many writers of the rapturous kind so much abound, one would be often at a loss to discover, whether or not it was exclamation which they aimed at. For it has now become a fashion, among these writers, to subjoin points of admiration to sentences which contain nothing but simple affirmations or propositions; as if, by an affected method of pointing, they could transform them in the reader's mind into high figures of eloquence. Much akin to this, is another contrivance practised by some writers, of separating almost all the members of their sentences from each other by blank lines; as if, by setting them thus asunder, they bestowed some special importance upon them; and required us, in going along, to make a pause at every other word, and weigh it well. This, I think, may be called a typographical figure of speech. Neither, indeed, since we have been led to mention the arts of writers for increasing the importance of their words, does another custom,

which prevailed very much some time ago, seem worthy of imitation ; I mean that of distinguishing the significant words, in every sentence, by italic characters. On some occasions, it is very proper to use such distinctions : but, when we carry them so far, as to mark with them every supposed emphatical word, these words are apt to multiply so fast in the author's imagination, that every page is crowded with italics ; which can produce no effect whatever, but to hurt the eye, and create confusion. Indeed, if the sense point not out the most emphatical expressions, a variation in the type, especially when occurring so frequently, will give small aid. And accordingly, the most masterly writers of late, have, with good reason, laid aside all those feeble props of significancy, and trusted wholly to the weight of their sentiments for commanding attention. But to return from this digression :

Another figure of speech, proper only to animated and warm composition, is what some critical writers call Vision ; when, in place of relating something that is past, we use the present tense, and describe it as actually passing before our eyes. Thus Cicero, in his fourth oration, against Cataline : “ Videor enim mihi hanc urbem videre  
 “ lucem orbis terrarum atque arcem omnium gen-  
 “ tium, subito uno incendio concidentem ; cerno  
 “ animo sepulta in patria miseros atque insepul-  
 “ tos acervos civium ; versatur mihi ante oculos

“ aspectus Cethegi, et furor, in vestra cæde bac-  
chantis \*.” This manner of description sup-  
poses a sort of enthusiasm, which carries the per-  
son who describes, in some measure, out of him-  
self; and, when well executed, must needs im-  
press the reader or hearer strongly, by the force  
of that sympathy which I have before explained.  
But, in order to a successful execution, it requires  
an uncommonly warm imagination, and such a  
happy selection of circumstances, as shall make us  
think we see before our eyes the scene that is  
described. Otherwise, it shares the same fate  
with all feeble attempts towards passionate figures;  
that of throwing ridicule upon the author, and  
leaving the reader more cool and uninterested  
than he was before. The same observations are  
to be applied to repetition, suspension, correction,  
and many more of those figurative forms of  
speech, which rhetoricians have enumerated among  
the beauties of eloquence. They are beautiful, or  
not, exactly in proportion as they are native ex-  
pressions of the sentiment or passion intended to  
be heightened by them. Let nature and passion

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\* “ I seem to myself to behold this city, the ornament of  
“ the earth, and the capital of all nations, suddenly involved  
“ in one conflagration. I see before me the slaughtered  
“ heaps of citizens lying unburied in the midst of their ruined  
“ country. The furious countenance of Cethegus rises to  
“ my view, while with a savage joy he is triumphing in your  
“ miseries.”



always speak their own language, and they will suggest figures in abundance. But, when we seek to counterfeit a warmth which we do not feel, no figures will either supply the defect, or conceal the imposture.

There is one figure (and I shall mention no more) of frequent use among all public speakers, particularly at the bar, which Quintilian insists upon considerably, and calls amplification. It consists in an artful exaggeration of all the circumstances of some object or action which we want to place in a strong light, either a good or a bad one. It is not so properly one figure, as the skilful management of several which we make to tend to one point. It may be carried on by a proper use of magnifying or extenuating terms by a regular enumeration of particulars, or by throwing together, as into one mass, a crowd of circumstances; by suggesting comparisons also with things of a like nature. But the principal instrument by which it works, is by a climax, or a gradual rise of one circumstance above another, till our idea be raised to the utmost. I spoke formerly of a climax in sound; a climax in sense, when well carried on, is a figure which never fails to amplify strongly. The common example of this is, that noted passage in Cicero, which every school-boy knows: “*Facius est vincere civem Romanum; scelus verberare; prope parricidium, necare; quid dicam in crucem*



“ tollere \* ? ” I shall give an instance from a printed pleading of a famous Scotch lawyer, Sir George M’Kenzie. It is in a charge to the jury, in the case of a woman accused of murdering her own child. “ Gentlemen, if one man had any  
“ how slain another, if an adversary had killed  
“ his opposer, or a woman occasioned the death  
“ of her enemy; even these criminals would have  
“ been capitally punished by the Cornelian law :  
“ but, if this guiltless infant, who could make no  
“ enemy, had been murdered by its own nurse,  
“ what punishments would not then the mother  
“ have demanded ? With what cries and exclamations would she have stunned your ears ?  
“ What shall we say then, when a woman, guilty  
“ of homicide, a mother of the murder of her innocent child, hath comprised all those misdeeds  
“ in one single crime ; a crime in its own nature  
“ detestable ; in a woman, prodigious ; in a mother, incredible ; and perpetrated against one  
“ whose age called for compassion, whose near  
“ relation claimed affection, and whose innocence  
“ deserved the highest favour ? ” I must take notice, however, that such regular climaxes as these, though they have considerable beauty, have, at the same time, no small appearance of art and

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\* “ It is a crime to put a Roman citizen in bonds ; it is  
“ the height of guilt to scourge him ; little less than parricide  
“ to put him to death : what name then shall I give to crucify-  
“ ing him ? ”

study ; and, therefore, though they may be admitted into formal harangues, yet they speak not the language of great earnestness and passion, which seldom proceed by steps so regular. Nor, indeed, for the purposes of effectual persuasion are they likely to be so successful, as an arrangement of circumstances in a less artificial order. For, when much art appears, we are always put on our guard against the deceits of eloquence ; but when a speaker has reasoned strongly, and, by force of argument, has made good his main point, he may then, taking advantage of the favourable bent of our minds, make use of such artificial figures to confirm our belief, and to warm our minds.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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